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Thomas Wolfe
at
Eighty-seven

*Papers Delivered at the Eighth Annual Meeting of the
Thomas Wolfe Society, Chapel Hill, 22-24 May 1987*



Edited by
H. G. Jones

NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY IMPRINTS
NUMBER 16

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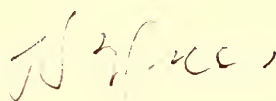
No. 16. *Thomas Wolfe at Eighty-seven* (1988)
edited by H. G. Jones

Thomas Wolfe at Eighty-seven

*Papers Delivered at the Eighth Annual Meeting of the
Thomas Wolfe Society, Chapel Hill, 22-24 May 1987*



Edited by

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "H. G. Jones", written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

H. G. Jones

Chapel Hill
NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY, INC.
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1988

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Introduction

As it did for its second annual meeting in 1981, the Thomas Wolfe Society met on the campus of the author's alma mater for its eighth annual meeting on 22–24 May 1987. And, as was done for the earlier meeting (see *Thomas Wolfe of North Carolina*, edited by H. G. Jones as No. 6 of the *North Caroliniana Society Imprints*, 1981), the North Caroliniana Society and the North Carolina Collection, cosponsors of both meetings, are pleased to publish the formal papers delivered in 1987. Additional proceedings—the business session, welcomes and introductions, Kay Reibold's videotape, Richard Walser's campus walking tour, exhibitions, social activities, and Richard Adler's performance at the closing banquet—were not appropriate for inclusion. In addition, Reid Huntley spoke without a formal paper. We believe that the dozen papers published herein contribute measurably to Wolfe scholarship and consequently should be made available for a larger audience than the approximately one hundred thirty-five registrants at the annual meeting. Although the papers vary somewhat in style and format, they have commonality in their attention to North Carolina's best known novelist.

Sessions were held in the University of North Carolina's Wilson Library, which had not yet officially reopened following a five-million-dollar renovation that lasted more than three years. An exhibition of materials from the Library's great Thomas Wolfe Collection was provided in the new North Caroliniana Gallery, and the new Thomas Wolfe Room was ceremonially opened. Alice R. Cotten of the North Carolina Collection and Frances A. Weaver of the University Archives made local arrangements for the meeting, and Harold Woodell of Clemson University served as program chairman. Officers of the Society for 1986–87 were Elizabeth Evans, president; Morton I. Teicher, vice-president; Bobbie E. Slaughter, secretary; and John S. Phillipson, treasurer.

In honor of the meeting, the North Caroliniana Society published number two in its *Keepsakes* series. It featured a letter written by Wolfe after publication of *Look Homeward, Angel*, and was addressed to Beverly C. Moore of his old UNC fraternity, Pi Kappa Phi. A copy is given upon request to contributors of ten dollars or more to the Society.

Quotations in the following essays from Wolfe's writings were made with the kind permission of Paul Gitlin, Administrator CTA of the Estate of Thomas Wolfe, who retains all rights.

North Carolina Collection
University of North Carolina Library
Chapel Hill

H. G. JONES



Friday, May 22, 1987

11:00 A.M.-

1:00 P.M. Registration: Lobby, Wilson Library

Afternoon Activities, Wilson Library

- 1:00 Welcome: *Elizabeth Evans*, Georgia Institute of Technology
Joseph M. Flora, UNC-CH
- Business: *Elizabeth Evans*, presiding
- Papers: *Duane Schneider*, Ohio University Press, presiding
- "Thomas Wolfe and Catherine Brett"
Robert J. Willis, East Stroudsburg State University
- "Detailing Wolfe's Career"
Carol Johnston, Clemson University

2:45 Break and Opening of Thomas Wolfe Room

3:30 "Thomas Wolfe and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings"
John L. Idol, Jr., Clemson University

4:00 Autograph signing with *David Herbert Donald*, author of *Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe*

Evening Activities, Carolina Inn (UNC Ballroom)

6:30 Social Hour (Cash Bar)

7:30 Dinner

Introduction of Speaker: *Joseph Flora*, UNC-CH

"Symbols and Symptoms"

Frank C. Wilson, Jr., M.D., UNC-CH

Saturday, May 23, 1987

Morning Activities, Wilson Library

- 9:00 Papers: *Andrea P. Brown*, Virginia State Library, presiding
- "Hugh Holman and Thomas Wolfe"
Jesse Gatlin, U.S. Air Force Academy
- "The Nowell-Aswell Letters"
Mary Aswell Doll, University of Redlands
Clara Stiles, Dartmouth, Massachusetts
- "Wolfe, *The New Yorker*, and American Humor"
David Kesterson, North Texas State University

10:30

Break. Walk to nearby Manning Hall

11:00

(In 209 Manning Hall)
Kay Reinbold's videotape, "An Escape into Life: Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*," hosted by *Richard Wälder*

11:45

Break for Lunch (on your own)

12:45

Campus Walking Tour, led by *Richard Wälder*
(Leaves from lobby of Carolina Inn)

Afternoon Activities, Wilson Library

- 1:45 Papers: *John Bassett*, North Carolina State University, presiding
- "'The Lost Boy' and the Line of Life"
James Clark, North Carolina State University
- "The Gants in a Bottle"
Elaine Jenkins, Raleigh

2:45

Break and Viewing of Exhibits

3:15

Panel Discussion: "Wolfe's Relationships with Women"
Reid Huntley, Ohio University, moderator
Carole Klein, Goddard College
Suzanne Stutman, Pennsylvania State University,
Ogontz Campus
William Snyder, Ohio University

Evening Activities, Morehead Building (Use East Entrance)

6:00

Social Hour in Banquet Hall

7:00

Dinner in Banquet Hall
Elizabeth Evans, presiding

Introduction of Speaker: *Doris Betts*, UNC-CH

Address by *Richard Adler*, New York City

Sunday, May 24, 1987

9:00

Meeting of Board of Trustees at home of *Dr. Frank C. Wilson, Jr.*



Thomas Wolfe and Catherine Brett

Robert J. Willis
East Stroudsburg University

In a letter to his brother Fred on 12 May 1934, Thomas Wolfe wrote:

I went over to Pennsylvania Monday on the invitation of a very nice and intelligent young lady. I did little except sleep and eat and see some beautiful country. I was over on the banks of the Delaware River straight across New Jersey from New York, thirty or forty miles above the Delaware Water Gap. Coming back Thursday, we drove down through the gap and saw some very beautiful country.¹

That “very nice and intelligent young lady” Wolfe referred to was Miss Catherine Brett.

The quest for gathering information about Catherine Brett transported me from Chapel Hill to East Stroudsburg, to Milford, to Dingman’s Ferry, all located in northeastern Pennsylvania, and then to Evergreen, Colorado. The seeds of my interest in Catherine Brett were planted in 1981 during the Thomas Wolfe Society meeting in Chapel Hill. Aldo Magi and Richard Walser had told me of their valiant, but deadened attempts to “track down” the story of Miss Brett in Milford, Pennsylvania. They then suggested I take up the pursuit since I was teaching at a university located about thirty-five miles from Milford, in northeastern Pennsylvania on the Delaware River. After much procrastination, I finally began my research in 1985.

This search for the identity of Catherine Brett, who, after my research, seems to have been a close friend of Thomas Wolfe from 1934 to his death in 1938, led me to the conclusion that their friendship was significant to both of them. Wolfe confided in and often asked Catherine for advice, similar to what he asked of other women in his life. Catherine acted as a therapist for some of the darker moments in his writing career. I, like many others, read references to “Miss Brett” in Elizabeth Nowell’s *Biography* and *Letters*, in Andrew Turnbull’s *Biography*,

in C. Hugh Holman and Sue Field Ross's *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe to His Mother*, in Richard Kennedy and Paschal Reeves's *Thomas Wolfe's Pennsylvania*, in A. Scott Berg's *Max Perkins*, and in David Herbert Donald's *Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe*.

I was fortunate to have a mid-career student, Sandy Leister, in my class, who lives in Milford. She accompanied me to Dingman's Ferry and Milford where I began my investigation by talking to the few remaining people who had worked at the "King" school for retarded children. These interviews led to several revelations.

I found that Miss Brett had a nephew, Brett Harrington, the son of Miss Brett's sister, Mary Alice. My search took me to Evergreen, Colorado, to find Brett Harrington. He could not tell me much about his aunt, except that he had found four letters written to Catherine Brett by Thomas Wolfe during 1934, and two letters written to a student, Ellen Field, at the "King" school. Mr. Harrington kindly gave me permission to use all or part of these unpublished letters. The letters shed light on the relationship between Wolfe and Catherine and on Wolfe's sympathetic attitude toward the school in Dingman's Ferry.

Catherine Brett's past is unclear. There is some evidence that she was from the South, perhaps West Virginia. From the archives of the *Milford Dispatch*, a typical small-town newspaper sustained by such items as births and deaths and visits, I found the following notices about the mysterious "Miss Brett" in July of 1934 and in January of 1935:

Mr. and Mrs. Brett, from West Virginia and Miss Brett visited Toronto, Canada.

Miss Brett visited relations in South Carolina.²

What brought her to Miss King's school for defective children in Dingman's Ferry, a small rural town in Pennsylvania that boasts as its pride a nineteenth-century ferry, remains a mystery. Today the ferry is gone. In its place is a narrow bridge spanning the Delaware River. This bridge connects northeastern Pennsylvania with northwestern New Jersey.

The area is rural and mountainous, not unlike Asheville during the first fifty years of the twentieth century. Perhaps the area appealed to Wolfe as a refuge from life in New York City. I found that "Miss Brett," as she was called, came to the area in 1930. She was about twenty years old at the time, a young woman with blonde hair, blue eyes, and described as "very pretty." She came to visit Miss King's school, which had moved to Dingman's Ferry from New Jersey. Miss Brett stayed at the school as a teacher and then as principal.

The buildings of the school and house, including a “penthouse” where Wolfe slept, are now gone. They fell victim to a National Recreation Service project known as the Tocks Island Project, an idea long since abandoned by the United States Government. But in its wake the project destroyed over seventy stately homes, including the school. The area is not, I posit, as Andrew Turnbull described it:

In May he had spent a week at a home for defective children run by his friend Catherine Brett at Dingman’s Ferry in a wild corner of Pennsylvania.³

The area surrounding Dingman’s Ferry was, and still is, a vacation area and a retirement haven for artists from New York City. About a two-hour drive from the city, the area boasts clean air, cool mornings and evenings, and pleasant days. Don Hudson, who volunteered his time as a life guard for Miss Brett’s students, and Don Budge, the famous tennis star, both retired in the area. Zane Grey wrote many of his frontier novels while living there.

Although these great houses are gone, I did obtain pictures of the school buildings and grounds, which were beautiful, along with a description of the land and buildings, from the National Park Service. The school consisted of two buildings, a large house with seven bedrooms which housed the students (all girls from wealthy families in New York and New Jersey), and another building that housed the school and the “penthouse,” which was connected to the school building. There was also a swimming pool. The property consisted of seven acres of land located on both sides of U.S. Route 209. Today, little remains of the school but the foundation of the pool and dirt roads, now covered by grass and trees.

My quest for information pertaining to Miss Brett led me to several people who had known her during the 1930s. The first woman I talked to was Miss Elizabeth Wolfe, who is still living in the area. She taught at the school from 1934 to 1939. Miss Wolfe, who has read all of Thomas Wolfe’s works, has kept all of her clippings of Wolfe and remembers meeting him once. She said he came for a week and took his meals with the students. Miss Wolfe said that she was overjoyed at meeting the author of *Look Homeward, Angel*. She recalls Miss Brett as a woman who loved the children, a woman who worked ceaselessly to make them happy, a woman who, it seemed, was always happy herself. Miss Wolfe remembered the pages in Elizabeth Nowell’s biography in which Miss Brett and the school are mentioned. She told me that Miss Brett visited New York City quite often, especially on holidays when the children went to their

parents' homes. She added that Miss Brett taught crafts and painting and read stories to the girls.

It would seem that Miss Brett was much more than a chauffeur and casual companion to Thomas Wolfe. A naturally kind and understanding woman, Miss Brett admittedly did serve as Wolfe's "pilot" on his annual visits to his cousin Jim in York Springs, Pennsylvania. For some reason, Wolfe did not mention Miss Brett's name to his mother in his letters. The closest he came to identifying her was in a letter written on 28 May 1936 to his mother:

I got pretty tired and took a three or four day trip down to Pennsylvania a week or two ago. A friend of mine who has a car drove me. We kept off the main highways as much as possible, took back-country roads and saw some of the most beautiful farming country in the world. We got as far as York Springs, went out and visited the graveyard where Papa's folks were buried, stopped off at York Springs and saw Jim and Dorothy and Aunt Mary, and came back through Pennsylvania, up the Delaware into New York state . . . and back to New York.⁴

That Wolfe confided in Catherine Brett and often sought her advice and consolation is revealed in the four letters the author sent to her during 1934. In a letter of 30 July 1934, Wolfe told her of an invitation he had received from a young lady in Virginia, inviting him to come down. He stated that he wanted to go, since the woman was a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell Perkins, but decided to "stick to the job as long as I can." Wolfe, I believe, admired Miss Brett's objectivity about his work. In the same letter he said, "I wish you would exert your scientific intelligence to find the reason for this [his getting started again on his writing]." He then contrasted his inability to work like a machine to the reliability of a motor car which one could almost always rely on. "But you can't always get forty miles an hour out of your head—no matter how much you want to."

Wolfe continues this letter with compliments to Miss Brett:

It was good to see you when you came to town. Maybe you bring me luck—I always seem to pick up and get going after one of your visits. This was particularly true during my visit to Dingman's in May. I don't think I ever worked harder, or got more done, in a similar period, than I did in those three weeks. I wrote a very important and necessary section of the book—almost 80,000 words—although when Perkins and I got through cutting, it was only half of that. He says it's a good piece of work—one of the best I have ever done. I know it must be very tedious for a young lady who would rather hear more interesting things, to be

told forever about someone's work, and to have everything reckoned in terms of work. But that is what this monstrous obsession does to one.

In the conclusion of the letter, Wolfe, in a highly emotional and cathartic tone, defends the plight of the writer and assails the critic for his endless questions about the artist's work.

We eat, drink, sleep, think, feel, and live with our work, and we can't forget it until we get it done. But I think we do the most complete job of forgetting of anyone on earth. A writer has no more interest in a book or story that has been published than he has in last year's telephone bill. It is a curious thing, but I am sure it is the artist who feels this most of all. I don't think people understand this very well, when they ask all kinds of questions about something he has done.

Wolfe's last note in his letter is a request that it won't be long before Miss Brett's next visit.

A month later, Wolfe again wrote a long letter to Miss Brett. Some of this 12 July 1934 letter appears in Elizabeth Nowell's *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*; however, the original letter in its entirety is one of the four held by Catherine Brett's nephew, Brett Harrington. A paragraph of this same letter also appears in A. Scott Berg's *Max Perkins*.⁵ Typically, Wolfe answered immediately—rather than continuing his writing—to tell his muse: “I spent three hours today trying to get started to work, and I hope that writing you this note will work some sort of magic spell, or bring me luck, or get me started.” The letter concerns Wolfe's reluctance to surrender his manuscript, *Of Time and the River*. The tone of the letter is conversational, as if he were talking to Miss Brett. The letter also includes a lengthy description of Wolfe's capitulation to Perkins's advice on limiting his manuscript, if indeed we are to believe Thomas Wolfe here. It seems Wolfe is holding back something when he admits to Miss Brett:

...and with a book which is as long as this and which has taken as much time, it is possible to get a kind of obsession, so that one can perfectly well work on it forever in an effort to protect it and to get in everything he wants to get in.

Praising Maxwell Perkins's patience and fortitude with his gargantuan work, Wolfe admits, “. . . I know that Mr. Perkins himself has lavished more care and hard work on this manuscript than any other I heard of would do.”

Predictably, as Wolfe ends the letter, he returns to his obsession with his “child” and decries its vivisection: “He [Perkins] already has most of the manuscript in his desk, but it will be another huge book and I suppose there will be another

siege of cutting and revision to go through." The letter ends with the usual wish that he will see Miss Brett again soon.

The next letter from Wolfe to Miss Brett is dated 24 May 1934, with the return address 865 First Avenue, New York City. This letter too is a long one. Again, thanking her for the comfort and rest he had found in his recent visit to Dingman's Ferry, Wolfe told Miss Brett that he had finished another 50,000 words, "for better or for worse." He also confessed that he was practically out of money.

Just now I am pretty worried about money and I feel that I've got to dig in and work if I want to eat with fair regularity. The gas man came and shut off the gas this morning, but I think I can borrow some money on an advance that is being sent me from England, and which, I hope to God, gets here in a few days.

Wolfe gives two paragraphs to a fellow writer, Owen Francis, whom he was deeply concerned about. Francis had a short story, "Steel Mill Lullaby," published in the April 1935 issue of *Scribner's Magazine*. In the same issue was Thomas Wolfe's satiric "One of the Girls in Our Party."⁶ He detailed Francis's financial difficulties with his agent and with Scribner's and promised he [Wolfe] would do his best to speak to Scribner's in his friend's behalf. Wolfe hoped to take Francis to Dingman's Ferry when he was out of the hospital. Francis already had met Miss Brett and Miss King, and he shared Wolfe's admiration for them.

The letter also included a conversation Wolfe had with a friend of Francis's, Brother Portner. It was difficult to ascertain Wolfe's intent in his section about Brother Portner. Wolfe told about a conversation:

Brother Portner was telling me the other night about the bourgeois Philistines of the C.W.A. (Civil Works Administration) and how uncongenial such surroundings were to his artistic soul, "but, of course, Tom," he added, "you don't know what it is as you have never worked." His gray hairs saved him.

Either Wolfe was being humorous or he literally meant what he said. I prefer the latter interpretation. Certainly, Wolfe would not allow a friendship to stand in the way of his true feelings.

I should add that all four of these letters to Miss Brett end on an optimistic note. Indeed, Wolfe seemingly enjoyed writing these personal and confessional letters to Miss Brett. The two had a kind of reciprocal kindness and understanding for each other. They must have met often in 1934, the year of these letters.

Wolfe continued to write to Miss Brett in 1936, 1937, and 1938. Two letters, written in 1938, can be found in the Pack Memorial Library in Asheville. There are also four additional letters written in 1936 and 1938 in the University of North Carolina Library at Chapel Hill. Catherine Brett's nephew, Brett Harrington, told me that he had had other letters and pictures, but, unfortunately, they were lost in his move from Milford, Pennsylvania, to Colorado. He could recall very little about his aunt's education and background, except to say she was quite intelligent and completely dedicated to her students' needs.

The other two letters Brett Harrington gave me were written in 1936 and addressed to Miss Ellen Field, who was, as I have said earlier, a student at the school. Both letters have the 865 First Avenue, New York City, return address. The first, written on 24 December, is simply a short letter thanking Ellen for a Christmas card she had sent to Thomas Wolfe. What is strikingly different about this letter and the one on 23 May is the shift in Wolfe's style from his elaborate, complex writing that often includes highly descriptive adjectives and adverbs and involved sentence structure to a very simplistic childlike use of simple sentences, using one or two syllable words: "I want to thank you for your nice Christmas card. It was one of the nicest that I got. And I was very happy to know that you thought of me." The letter is signed, "Your friend, Tom Wolfe."

In the second letter, written in four, three-line paragraphs, Wolfe thanks Miss Field for the "nice" letter and for the "beautiful" design she had drawn for him. Wolfe kindly and thoughtfully answered every part of Miss Field's letter, which was written for her by Miss Brett. The novelist who wrote, among other works, four great American novels, promised this retarded child-woman that he would accompany her for a treat in Dingman's Ferry on his next visit: "Yes, I love ice cream cones and hope you will treat me to one the next time I see you." The letter offers his best wishes to Miss Brett, Miss King, Miss Zimmerman, Mrs. Kaufman, Mrs. Wolfe, and to the children.

To some it may seem surprising that Thomas Wolfe took time from his arduous writing schedule to write to Ellen Field. To others the task was as indigenous to the author's nature as his writing about the hundreds of characters from all strata of society in this country and in Europe.

These six letters give birth to much speculation about the friendship of Thomas Wolfe and Catherine Brett. What is known is that both individuals led rich, fulfilling lives. The grievous loss of Thomas Wolfe—a loss that affected so many of his family members, friends, critics, and readers—must have been tragic to Catherine Brett, who outlived him by twenty years. She later married Miles Spenser, an artist from New York City. Both died in the 1960s.

There was much in Catherine Brett's youth, her demeanor, her selfless struggle for her students, her ability to listen, to care, and in her concern for Wolfe's career (for a few years) that must have attracted the author. When he was not near, he maintained communication in letters, indicating his failures and his triumphs. Catherine Brett shared his many bouts of loneliness in his self-induced isolation and dedication to his art from 1934 to 1938. Wolfe's last letter, housed in the Pack Memorial Library, was written on 19 April 1938. Perhaps, if she were here today, she would be glad that she knew him in his fortunate times as well as in his less fortunate times. While they knew each other, they possessed together the precious past that we can only imagine.

Notes

¹Elizabeth Nowell, ed., *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 410. Segments of these letters were reprinted by permission of Paul Gitlin, Administrator CTA of the estate of Thomas Wolfe. I acknowledge the assistance of Brett Harrington, nephew of Catherine Brett, who gave me permission to quote from six letters; Aldo Magi and Richard Walser, who started me on my quest for Catherine Brett; Sandy Leister, who arranged for my meetings with former employees of the Brett School and obtained pictures of the original school at Dingman's Ferry; and Elizabeth Wolfe, a former teacher under Catherine Brett, who told me about her years at the school.

²*The Milford Dispatch*, 26 July 1934; 17 January 1935.

³Andrew Turnbull, *Thomas Wolfe* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), 193.

⁴C. Hugh Holman and Sue Fields Ross, eds., *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe to His Mother* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943) 264.

⁵Elizabeth Nowell, ed., *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 418, 419.

⁶*Scribner's Magazine* (April 1935).





Thomas Wolfe: Detailing a Literary Career

Carol Johnston
Clemson University

Books, like the men who create them, struggle for survival, and for every book that survives to produce further printings or engender new editions, ten thousand go out of print. So, a literary canon like Thomas Wolfe's—an enormous collection of novels, short stories, plays, poems, and interviews—that remains vitally alive half a century after the author's death—is a miraculous thing. It is, as John Milton reminds us, the lifeblood of a masterspirit, made immortal in the written word. The task of the descriptive bibliographer is to define a literary canon clearly and accurately, listing and describing books, book and periodical appearances, quotations, keepsakes, etc., so that the entirety of an author's work—parts of which are often related in significant ways—is made accessible to the reader. A student of Wolfe, for example, would use a secondary bibliography such as John Phillipson's *Thomas Wolfe: A Reference Guide* to determine what a particular critic had to say about *Of Time and the River*; he would turn to a descriptive bibliography to determine which periodical appearances by Wolfe were carved from or later incorporated into that novel or to determine the descent or lineage of that text through time—identifying editions, printings, and unusual or variant copies.

Looking at a descriptive bibliography, for instance, he would find that the most recent printing of the first edition of *Of Time and the River*, the first single-volume printing of that work to be distributed in wrappers, appeared in 1980 in the *Scribner Library of Contemporary Classics* series, and, that the novel has been reprinted three times in this format in the last seven years. He might be intrigued to find that this printing, widely used in colleges and universities, is an offset printing of the first printing of that work. That is, the text was reproduced photolithographically from a copy of the first printing of *Of Time and the River* which was probably made in late February 1935 several weeks

before the novel was officially published on 8 March 1935. Since there were over a hundred substantive errors in the first printing of that novel, errors incorporated when Wolfe's handwriting was inaccurately transcribed by a secretary and which were gradually eradicated from the novel over the next successive seven printings, it might be of interest to this student to note that the text for this most recent printing of Wolfe's second novel is, in fact, the most corrupt and least authoritative of all of the printings of that work. In analyzing Wolfe's novel, he might more accurately refer to the eighth printing of that book, which more accurately represents Wolfe's authorial intent.¹

My paper, today, is based on research completed in the process of preparing *Thomas Wolfe: A Descriptive Bibliography* which will be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press later this summer.² Its purpose is two-fold: to suggest the role that descriptive bibliography plays in detailing an author's literary career and, then, of particular interest to those of you who collect Wolfe, to describe some unusual bibliographical twists in the Wolfe canon.

Like a genealogist tracing the lineage of a family, the descriptive bibliographer traces the descent of a specific work—noting its printings and editions. In so doing, he indirectly defines the health of a writer's career at any particular time, as it is measured by the size and number of printings of his work.

Wolfe's career, which can be arbitrarily marked as beginning in 1917 with the publication of "A Field in Flanders" in the *University of North Carolina Magazine*, is a particularly healthy one. The numerous recent printings of his work and the scholarly activity attending it attest to its vitality. Since his death in 1938, no fewer than twenty-four full-length books and pamphlets containing material written wholly or substantially by Wolfe have been published, close to 6,000 pages. Nine of these have appeared in the last decade—eight within the last five years. Much of Wolfe's work has been significantly reprinted. *Look Homeward, Angel*, for instance, first published by Scribner's in 1929 in an edition of 5,540 copies, has appeared in fourteen different editions, over seventy printings in all over the last fifty-eight years. The most recent of these, an English paperback published in the *Penguin Modern Classics* series, appeared in 1984, marking a resurgence of interest in Wolfe in England forty-six years after his death. The first edition of *Of Time and the River*, alone, one of six editions of that work, has gone through more than thirty printings—the first five printings of which totaled 30,000 copies.

Facts—facts—facts! Well, what do they prove? Well, they disprove the breezy generalizations of one high-powered critic who, of late, has charged that Thomas Wolfe can no longer be read.³ Publishers are unbiased auditors of the public

taste, motivated by a desire for profit. They publish, very simply, what sells, and refuse to publish what does not sell. The fact that Wolfe's works have been and continue to be massively reprinted proves only one thing—he has been and continues to be widely read.

There are, of course, other dimensions to an author's career that are important. Perhaps the most intriguing to the descriptive bibliographer is the uncovering of unusual bibliographic items—items that mark surprising twists and turns in the publication of a writer's work. Wolfe's literary canon is marked by several of these items. Perhaps because of the length of his work, perhaps because of its nature—there seems to have been very little that his publishers were not willing to do to his writing. In the Wolfe canon these bibliographical anomalies fall into several easily definable categories: (1) offset printings, (2) copyright issues, and (3) English editions.

One of the more interesting oddities in the Wolfe canon concerns the trade and limited edition printings of an otherwise fairly innocuous book, *The Correspondence of Thomas Wolfe and Homer Andrew Watt*, published by New York University Press in 1954. The two printings of this book bear different imprints: one bears the New York University Press imprint and the other bears a New York University Press Geoffrey Cumberlege/Oxford University Press imprint. On this basis, first-printing status has been attributed to the New York University Press imprint, assuming the other printing to be a later English printing of that book.⁴

My investigation has revealed just the opposite. The New York University Press Geoffrey Cumberlege/Oxford University Press printing is the earlier of the two—the actual first printing. The books differ in more than imprint. Although the texts of both printings have been made from the same setting of type, the roman numbers and tapered rules at the heads of the letters have been reset, as have the half title and the section title on page 47. None of these facts, however, adequately delineates the order of the printings. The fact that only the New York University Press/Oxford University Press printing bears the imprint of a printer, Spiral Press, first suggested that this might be the earlier printing. Spiral Press, under the direction of its owner, Joseph Blumenthal, did not do reprints—and although Spiral Press files at Dartmouth do not record this printing, Blumenthal himself remembers the New York University/Oxford University Press printing as a first printing.⁵ Since the Spiral Press did not prepare a second printing of this book, it is likely that the later New York University printing was offset printed from the first printed pages, blanking out the data not pertinent to its second printing. This plus the fact that the leaves of the

New York University Press/Oxford University Press edition are larger than and its gatherings more regular than the respective leaves and gatherings of the New York University Press edition strongly indicates that the New York University Press/Oxford University Press printing preceded the New York University Press printing. Still, date of printing and date of publication are hardly synonymous; the weekly list of publications in *Publishers' Weekly* suggests simultaneous publication.

The Publishers' Weekly list of publications for 30 January 1954 notes that *The Correspondence of Thomas Wolfe and Homer Andrew Watt* was published by New York University Press the previous week "separately and in a boxed set with 'Thomas Wolfe at Washington Square.'" The book sold for \$2.50 and the boxed set sold for \$10.00. A New York University Press advertisement appearing in the 22 May 1954 issue of *Publishers' Weekly* referred to this boxed set as a "Limited Edition." *Thomas Wolfe at Washington Square* bears the New York University Press/Oxford University Press imprint and is the same size as the New York University Press/Oxford University Press printing of *The Correspondence of Thomas Wolfe and Homer Andrew Watt*. Although it is possible that the New York University Press/Oxford University Press printing was sold both in the boxed set and separately, it is more likely that the first printing New York University Press/Oxford University Press printing was sold in the boxed set, while the second printing New York University Press book was sold separately.

Equally as intriguing were the steps taken by Heinemann's, Wolfe's English publisher, to protect its copyright of *From Death to Morning* and *The Story of a Novel*. The British Library in London and the Bodleian Library at Oxford, like our Library of Congress, serve Great Britain as copyright libraries. Copyright application requires depositing copies of a book in one or the other of these collections. Deposit copies are then stamped with the date of receipt to indicate the date of deposit. Because it had what it loosely defined as "copyright complications" with the publication of *Of Time and the River*, Heinemann's requested a dozen sets of sheets of the first printing of Wolfe's *From Death to Morning* from Scribner's. Then on 14 November 1935, the day of the publication of the book by Scribner's, and four months before Heinemann's printed its own edition, Heinemann's deposited a "copyright issue" at the British Library—labeling it the first English edition. This book, with the exception of its canceled title leaf and binding, is identical to the first American printing—although, it is on record at the British Library as the first English edition.

Even more surprising are the variant copies of Wolfe's *The Story of a Novel*, a book which exists in its first printing in three separate issues, the last of which

exists in two separate states. Issues are sub-units within single printings—books in which there is an alteration affecting the condition of publication or sale to *some* copies of a given printing (usually a canceled title page). States are also sub-units of a single printing, but reflect alterations that do not affect the condition of publication or sale. Although not uncommon, it is unusual to find this many states and issues of a book published in the twentieth century. The first issue, the Scribner's printing published on 21 April 1936, contains a tipped-in dedication leaf to Alfred Dashiell. Heinemann's, preparing a dummied copy of this book, chose not to cancel the title page and bind the book in a Heinemann's cover, as they had with *From Death to Morning*. To protect their copyright, they simply pasted a strip of paper containing the Heinemann's imprint over the Scribner's imprint on the title page of the Scribner's book, and deposited this copy in the British Library seven days after its publication in America. This copy is the second issue of the book.

Seven months later, Heinemann's distributed copies of the third issue of the book, American sheets of *The Story of a Novel* without the tipped-in dedication page and with a cancel title leaf, in a Heinemann's binding. However, the story has still one more twist—for the copy of this issue deposited at the Bodleian, either through error or mischance, differs significantly from the copy deposited at the British Library. The copy deposited at the British Library prints copyright information on the verso of the canceled title leaf; the verso of the canceled title leaf in the Bodleian Library is blank—thereby making it a second state of this third issue.

At its best, descriptive bibliography is, as W. W. Greg, L. C. Wroth, and Fredson Bowers have noted, a bridge to textual study.⁶ By identifying the various printings and editions of a work, the descriptive bibliographer enables the student of a text to identify variations in the subsequent printings or editions of that text that might be authoritative, that is, indicate the author's final intent. To this end, *Thomas Wolfe: A Descriptive Bibliography* lists complete substantive collations, that is, variations which affect changes in wording, for the American and English editions of *Look Homeward, Angel*.

The English edition of *Look Homeward, Angel* is an example of the kind of liberties publishers seemed to be willing to take with Wolfe's work. It is clearly thirteen pages shorter than the American edition; however, a sight-collation of these two editions suggests the true dimensions of the liberties taken (possibly on both sides of the Atlantic) with Wolfe's text. The English edition of *Look Homeward, Angel*, published by Heinemann's nine months after the Scribner's edition, differs from its predecessor in 975 points: 911 of which are accidentals

and sixty-four of which are substantive. A single substantive change can be as limited as one word or run any number of pages. So when a bibliographer specifies sixty-four substantive changes, it is impossible to tell how dramatically one edition differs from another.

Several of the substantive changes in the English edition are fairly lengthy. The largest of these is a cut of twenty-five consecutive pages at the end of chapter 24—which in combination with a four-page cut appearing earlier in that chapter reduces the length of that chapter from thirty-one to two pages. The most complicated of these changes is the movement of three pages of material from the end of chapter 23 to the end of chapter 21. The most maladroitly handled of these changes is a cut of some nine pages from the end of chapter 28 and some two pages from the beginning of chapter 29—which resulted in dropping the chapter break and heading for chapter 29 in the English edition. The material from the 29th chapter retained in that edition is appended to the end of chapter 28—which is then immediately followed by chapter 30. There are, in addition, two lengthy passages added to the English edition which are not present in the American edition—twenty lines on page 341 focusing on the pretentiousness of nationalism and the folly of war and two pages—following almost immediately thereafter—burlesquing English war books. Altogether, the English edition differs substantively from the American edition in about sixty pages—or 10% of its text.

The sixty-four substantive variants seem to fall into three categories: (1) expurgations, deletions of references to British historical or literary figures that would have proven distasteful to English readers and deletions of or clarifications of distinctly American references, (2) variants representing attempts to correct logical inconsistencies in the text; and (3) variants that coincide with material that was subject to contention in the American edition. Since Duane Schneider deals with the first of these categories in his groundbreaking article, “Thomas Wolfe, England, and Look Homeward, Angel,”⁷ I will focus on the last two categories—which account for some forty-six pages of the sixty pages of variation in the text.

The most complicated variant reading involves moving three pages of material describing Eliza’s trip to Florida during Eugene’s fourteenth year from the end of the 23rd chapter in the American edition to the end of the 21st chapter in the English edition. Although the authority for this change is undocumented, its motivation, the correction of a logical inconsistency, is self-evident.

Eugene begins study at the private school set up in Altamont by John Dorsey Leonard and his wife, Margaret, in August 1912, about a month before Eugene’s twelfth birthday. Chapter 22 in the American edition begins “Toward the begin-

ning of Eugene's fourteenth year, when he had been a student at Leonard's for two years, Ben got work for him as a paper carrier." The rest of the chapter in typical Wolfean fashion, describes Eugene's "Niggertown" route which required him to rise at 3:30 every morning—tracing it through all four seasons, at least one year, possibly more. Chapter 23, however, begins with Eugene's decision not to tell the Leonards about his paper route, knowing that they will oppose it as potentially dangerous to his health and damaging to his studies. Chapter 23 concludes with the three pages of variant material in question. These three pages describe Eliza Gant's extended trip to Florida (a trip which enables her to make stops in Miami, Palm Beach, and Orlando)—explicitly stating that this trip took place during Eugene's fourteenth year—and that Eugene boarded with the Leonards while his mother was in Florida. It would have been highly unlikely, then, that Eugene, who began his paper route at the beginning of his fourteenth year and arose at 3:30 every morning to work his route, could have kept it a secret from the Leonards during that indeterminate period in his fourteenth year that he was boarding with them.

By moving the material relating to Eliza's trip to Florida from the end of the 23rd chapter to the end of the 21st chapter and deleting the clause specifying that Eugene began his paper route at the *beginning* of his fourteenth year from his first sentence in chapter 22, the English edition corrects this logical inconsistency. In the English edition, Eliza's trip to Florida now physically precedes the passage describing Eugene's employment as a paperboy, the time frame for which is less specifically not "at the beginning of his fourteenth year," but "when he had been a student at Leonard's for two years." Given the fact that Eugene would be at least fourteen after two years with the Leonards, it is plausible that Eliza could leave Altamont for an extended Florida visit—leaving Eugene to board with the Leonards and return, sometime in Eugene's fourteenth year, *prior* to his decision to take on a paper route, enabling Eugene to keep that route a secret from the Leonards.

The remaining changes—involving over forty pages of material—are clustered in chapters 24, 25, and 33. The documentation for these changes, surprisingly, exists not in Wolfe's correspondence with his English editor, A. S. Frere-Reeves, but in his correspondence with Scribner's editor John Hall Wheelock concerning the galleys of the first edition of *Look Homeward, Angel*. On 19, 22, and 23 July 1929, while in Ocean Point, Maine, reading the galleys for the novel, Wolfe posted three successive letters to Wheelock.⁸ The context of the discussion is that Wolfe has received galleys 1 to 100 for the novel. Galleys 1 to 70 have been proofed by Wolfe, returned to Wheelock, and already set in page proof.

Galleys 79 to 100 remain in Wolfe's hands. Wolfe comments on the disturbing news that the seventy-five pages of edited typescript used as setting copy for those galleys has disappeared. He is concerned, but not overly concerned, because a second complete copy of the unedited typescript is being held in the Scribner's office. "Of course," he adds, "what revisions were made in those 75 pages I don't know."

By 22 July, as he returns galleys 79 to 90 to Wheelock, Wolfe is more agitated about the missing typescript pages. "Will you please urge the printer to recover it?" he asks. "There are several places here that cause me difficulty. Naturally without the manuscript I cannot remember word for word the original, but it seems to me that there are omissions in several places that are not covered by the cuts Mr. Perkins and I made."⁹

The references in Wolfe's letters to Wheelock are to galley numbers, but the context of his discussion and specific references to identifiable material on galley 85 (a reference to a German book, *Der Zerbrochene Krug* that appears on page 319 of the American edition) and galley 94 (on which Wolfe adds a sentence beginning "Having arranged to meet her" that appears on page 352 of the American edition) makes it possible to locate the points of Wolfe's concern. These points occur in chapters 24 and 25 of the novel, coinciding to those points at which the American edition differs from the English edition. These points are, respectively, (1) "the boys-going-from-school scene," pages 324 to 348 in the American edition, a twenty-four page segment in which Wolfe scans the characters and scenes of Altamont which is all but eliminated from the English edition, and (2) a burlesque of English war books, a passage some five pages in length appearing in the English edition which does not appear in the American edition.

Wolfe mentions the boys-going-from-school scene in his letter to Wheelock of 22 July. It is, he feels, the passage most damaged by cuts made in the galleys that he does not remember authorizing. "Mr. Perkins and I," he writes, "took out a big chunk, but there is now a confusing jump that nullifies the meaning of several passages."¹⁰ In this segment of chapter 24, Eugene, asking the Leonards' permission, runs off to town—meets George Graves on the way—and the two encounter and comment on dozens of Altamont characters and sights before stopping at Wood's Pharmacy to order two chocolate milks from the soda jerk. Among the characters introduced are Mrs. Van Zeck, the wife of a lung specialist; William Jennings Bryan; Old Man Avery; and Colonel Pettigrew. In short order, Wolfe traces the pattern of the town—race, culture, and background—juxtaposing German and English quotes, German and English phrases, and German and English descendents—only to conclude in a description of Colonel James Buchanan Petti-

grew, head of the Pettigrew Military Academy, adorned in a Confederate cape and discussing war with two pimply cadets. It is a section in which English and German are carefully balanced—and unauthorized cuts could easily throw them out of balance. Wolfe writes to Wheelock, “I do hope people will not look on this section as a mere stunt . . . it is not a stunt.”¹¹ The cuts, he adds, have caused problems—gaps—he seems unable to solve without the help of the missing pages of edited typescript—and he is having difficulty filling the holes. All he can finally say is, “I have tried to patch it up as well as I could . . .”¹² The entire segment—and an additional five pages of material at the beginning of chapter 24 in which the school boys at the Leonards’ play with glib false readings of German texts—is deleted from the English edition.

It is possible to imagine a number of scenarios accounting for the deletion of thirty pages of material from the English edition coincident with material that Wolfe, although pressured to cut from the American edition, struggled to retain: (1) Wolfe, involved in making cuts in the text for his British publisher, found it easiest to choose passages that Wheelock and Perkins had suggested could be cut,¹³ (2) the setting copy for the English edition was galleys or page proofs for the American edition—with Wheelock’s suggested cuts marked, (3) Wheelock made suggestions to Heinemann’s about cuts that he would like to have seen made in the American edition, or (4) Wolfe gave up trying to reconstruct passages that seemed to have been mangled in editing, and for which the edited typescript had been lost and decided to cut them. Whatever, it is fairly clear that in July 1929, at least, Wolfe felt strongly enough about this passage to buck Wheelock and Perkins and insist on its retention. This argues strongly for the authority of the American rather than the English edition at this point.

However, Wolfe’s correspondence with Wheelock, these same three letters, suggests the authority of the English text over the American at another point. An additional eighty lines of material which do not appear in the American edition, two closely related passages, the largest of which is more than two pages long, appear on pages 342 to 344 of the English edition. In this segment, Eugene (who has been studying the literature of romanticized war-enchancement under the direction of the pro-British Leonards) after reading Rupert Brooke imagines himself composing an excessively literary letter at the front: “‘It’s no use, mater,’ he wrote six hours before the attack in which he fell, ‘I simply can’t bring myself to hate these Huns. I dare say they are mostly chaps like me with their own Pollys and Paters, and dear little flaxen-headed Tommies somewhere back home.’” This “last letter” is followed by the eulogy of his close friend, George Graves, transformed in Eugene’s imagination into Captain George Albert Fortescue Graves, D.S.O.

Eugene's fantasy precedes by seven lines the sentence that Wolfe writes Wheelock he has inserted on galley 94 ("Having arranged to meet her. . ."). Had the war fantasy segment been included in the American edition, then, it too should have appeared on, or in the vicinity of galley 94.

Wolfe's letter to Wheelock of 23 July indicates that this was, in fact, where he expected to find it. "There was originally a burlesque of the English war books on galley 94—was this omitted in the cuts?"¹⁴ This variant may or may not have been coupled with the shorter twenty-line passage inserted one page earlier in the English edition, in which an omniscient narrator breaks into John and Margaret Leonard's maudlin pro-British war sentiments to comment in two paragraphs on the folly of nationalism and war: "They were lifted up on the wings of their enormous folly. . . . They were drunken, inspired, by that great false vision of Arcadia unvisited."

Several other variants, all in chapter 33 and all deleting reference to Eugene's employment as an American armaments worker, about eight pages altogether, may also hinge on the addition of these two passages to the English edition. Broadly mocking British war efforts and nationalism in chapter 25, Wolfe or his editors may have been unwilling to focus on Eugene's employment behind the lines—inevitably causing a British audience to draw comparisons between Eugene's service at home and the real hardships faced by the British soldiers Wolfe burlesqued in chapter 25, who had actually served at the front.

The literary career of a writer is not identical to his work, although it is coincident to that work. Where the literary critic focuses on the interaction of plot and character, motivation and action, symbol and imagery in the author's text, the student of an author's literary career focuses on the publishing history of that work—the interaction between author and publisher, publisher and audience—and the effect that these relationships have had on the work produced. Preparing a descriptive bibliography of Thomas Wolfe is the first step to this kind of study.

Notes

¹See Carol Johnston, "The Critical Reception of *Of Time and the River*," *Thomas Wolfe Review*, 11 (Spring 1987): 45–54.

²This work was funded (in part) by the National Foundation for the Humanities, the Southern Regional Education Board, and the University Research Grant Committee at Clemson University.

³Harold Bloom, "Passionate Beholder of America in Trouble," *New York Times Book Review* (8 February 1987): 13–14.

⁴Bibliographical descriptions of this book vary: Elmer D. Johnson (*Thomas Wolfe: A Checklist* [Kent State University Press, 1970]) notes only the New York University Press/Oxford University Press printing; John S. Phillipson (*Thomas Wolfe: A Reference Guide* [Boston: G. K. Hall, 1972]) notes only the New York University Press printing.

⁵ANS to Carol Johnston from Joseph Blumenthal dated 21 April 1985.

⁶See W. W. Greg, "Bibliography—An Apologia," *The Library*, 4th series, 13 (1933): 121–143; L. C. Wroth, "Early Americana," *Rosenbach Lectures in Bibliography for 1947*; and Fredson Bowers, *Principles of Bibliographical Description* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 9.

⁷Duane Schneider, "Thomas Wolfe, England, and *Look Homeward, Angel*" in Richard S. Kennedy, ed., *Thomas Wolfe: A Harvard Perspective* (Athens, Ohio: Croissant & Company, 1983), 55–72.

⁸Elizabeth Nowell, *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe* (New York: Scribner's, 1956), 182–191.

⁹*Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 187–188.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 188.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³There is no evidence that Wolfe read galley or page proof for the English edition. Sole documentary evidence for the authority of this edition is a single sentence in a letter sent by Wolfe to his sister Mabel from New York on 5 January 1930: "The English publisher [A. S. Frere-Reeves] is here and has me at work making certain cuts in the book" (Nowell, 215). It has been rumored, but never conclusively proven, that the page proof of the American edition was used as setting copy for the English edition; however, a telegram from Heinemann's to Scribner's dated 18 October 1929, the day on which *Look Homeward, Angel* was first published and on which Heinemann's signed the contract for the English edition, requested a complete set of the page proofs for the book. (Scribner's Records, Firestone Library, Princeton University).

¹⁴Nowell, 189.





Thomas Wolfe and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

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Like Thomas Wolfe, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings came to enjoy both the friendship and encouragement of Maxwell Perkins, who helped them in his role as editor at Scribner's to publish some of their finest, most enduring works. Perkins arranged to have Rawlings and Wolfe join him for dinner in a New York restaurant and found the occasion full of unexpected turns and twists. Rawlings never tired of praising Wolfe to Perkins or begging him to curb Wolfe's rhetorical flights. From Perkins she heard about some of Wolfe's artistic and emotional problems and realized that Perkins gave her less attention during the time she was writing *Golden Apples* than she felt she needed because Tom and Perkins were having "a great struggle" over *Of Time and the River* (Perkins 94). Rawlings soon learned that she could write candidly to Perkins about what she considered Wolfe's failings as a writer, and she came to admire Wolfe's decision to fight a libel suit in court, believing with him that a writer must protect artistic freedom. She understood how deep Perkins's feelings ran for Wolfe and tried to console him following Wolfe's untimely death. And she believed, as Faulkner also did, that Wolfe had the potential to be one of America's greatest writers. The recently published *Selected Letters of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, edited by Gordon E. Bigelow and Laura V. Monti, makes it possible to tell a story only partly told by Andrew Turnbull and A. Scott Berg in their biographies of Wolfe and Perkins, respectively.

A letter of congratulation on the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel* (Kennedy 181) failed to spark Wolfe's interest in a writer whose mark was yet to be made. Rawlings did not sell her first story to Scribner's until March 1930, and her first commercial and artistic triumph did not come until three years later, when Scribner's published *South Moon Under*. Even though Wolfe seems never to have written her, Rawlings was following his career in the pages of *Scribner's Magazine* or in *From Death to Morning*. She both admired and disliked

what she read. Reacting to stories by both Wolfe and Hemingway in the May 1933 issue of *Scribner's Magazine*, she wrote Perkins, who had mentioned to her some of the toil he was undergoing with Wolfe as they sweated over putting *Of Time and the River* together:

Yes, I've been following the Wolfe stories. It was rather startling to have the first one in the same issue of the magazine with the Hemingway story—you couldn't get a wider variance in technique if you culled over the whole field of American writers. I read the Hemingway story first and then turned immediately to the Wolfe story—and I was unable to read the Wolfe. Two days later I picked it up again, and read and enjoyed it. I didn't like "The Train and the City" nearly so well as "Death the Proud Brother";] however, when Wolfe hits it right with his very gorgeous style, the effect is tremendously satisfying like a symphony at its best. When he beats his chest and tears his hair and pounds on the drums too lavishly, as I thought he did in the first story, you get more the effect of an awfully enthusiastic German band, and you rather long to empty pitchers of water from the third story, to shut up the tumult. I imagine he's the sort of person who has to get his effects that way or not at all, and that there's no such thing as safely toning him down. (Rawlings, *Letters* 72-73.)

"Toning him down" remained one of her repeated requests to Perkins.

During the tussle that Wolfe and Perkins were having in giving shape and focus to *Of Time and the River*, Rawlings wrote:

You do have your hands full. I pity you with Tom Wolfe's gorgeous bedlam. As I see it, he *must* discipline himself. Please don't spare the blue-pencil, as far as he will stand for it without shooting you on sight. He repeats and repeats, and says in four magnificent ways, what could have been said more magnificently in any one. His own sonorousness betrays him. If you would only give him Hemingway's restraint! (Rawlings, *Letters* 85-86.)

That she had the courage to repeat her conviction that Perkins should more frequently put his blue-pencil to use appears in her charge that, in Wolfe's case, he was being "too lenient a critic" (98). She bluntly told Perkins to "raise hell with Thomas Wolfe, to make him do the artistic thing and not the chest-beating thing. . . . You have too much sympathy with the torment of the writer's mind. A writer was born to be tormented. It is his destiny. You should torment us still further, when you see, as surely, you must see, the inadequate thing developing" (98-99). These words reveal something about her own cry for help with

Golden Apples, a work not going well and not receiving many suggestions for improvement from Perkins because of his exhaustive labors over *Of Time and the River*. Rawlings wanted Perkins to wrest a better book from her than what she had written and took this occasion to air her chagrin that he was proving too lenient a critic in her case as well as Wolfe's.

When Wolfe disciplined himself, allowing the artist to speak rather than the perorating orator, Rawlings was quick to say how much she admired him, though she felt "entirely inferior as an artist" to yield to the temptation to write him (102-03). Having read the sketches and stories in *From Death to Morning*, she told Perkins that she was

glad to have the "Web of Earth"—one of my favorites—in permanent form. I believe the reason Wolfe was so successful with that, speaking so much to the point, was because he allowed his character to absorb him. He was no more redundant than the old woman would have been. It was truly her story—not Tom Wolfe perorating—and it had as great a reality as anything he has done. (Rawlings, *Letters* 102.)

Rawlings did not know whether Wolfe should be sent packing to Siberia, as Hemingway had suggested in *Snows of Kilimanjaro* to serve time for his literary offences, but she did find Wolfe guilty of "indulging himself in the deliciousness of piling word on word, phrase on phrase, rhythm on rhythm. Used judiciously, his cumulative effect is prodigious, of course. Over-done, it is like too much poetry, or too much symphony music, or too much passion—cloying, surfeiting" (102). If Wolfe's shortcomings were mostly stylistic, Hemingway's were personal. She disliked Hemingway's defensiveness, his "shadow-boxing with the sophisticated world" (102).

While making these assessments of her two fellow Scribner's authors, she was delightedly accepting Perkins's invitation to accompany him and Wolfe to the battlefield at Chancellorsville, a visit planned for the late fall or early winter of 1935 but never made. She was not to meet Wolfe until June 1937, when Perkins brought them together for drinks and a meal in New York City soon after she came there bearing the manuscript of *The Yearling*. Their conversation at the Chatham Walk and Wolfe's whirlwind tour of the fish and vegetable markets on Fulton Street in the wee hours of the morning prompted her to offer Perkins a suggestion for the episode when he came to write what she wanted him to call "The Perils of an Editor; or, Days and Nights with Authors." The episode would be worth a brief chapter in his memoirs, she was sure. The trio left for drinks in the afternoon, Wolfe a little reticent until liquor loosened him up. When their talk turned to the meal they would have, they decided

on steaks. While waiting for them, they continued their talk, Rawlings turning the topic to suicide, a subject she liked to discuss on abstract grounds. Wolfe somehow thought that she was suggesting that he commit suicide and “refused at the top of his lungs, ‘even to satisfy his publishers’” (137). Seeing that she had ventured too tender a topic or misreading Wolfe’s love of the histrionic, Rawlings wrote, “I wished I had argued about something simple, like transcendentalism” (102). Their meal and drinking returned to a calm state when this outburst was over, and at three in the morning Wolfe led Rawlings and Perkins on a quest for some oysters on the half-shell on Fulton Street. Rawlings asked Perkins to include this madcap outing when he got around to doing his recollections of his literary life. If he were ever to write such a book, he must be sure to describe “Tom Wolfe plowing his way among the vegetables in a drizzle of rain at four o’clock in the morning, while you and I followed like pieces broken off from a meteor in transit” (137). Realizing that she should not return to her friend’s home in Long Island at 4:30 in the morning, she accepted Perkins’s invitation to be his guest for what remained of the night. Meanwhile, not wanting her hostess to worry about Rawlings, Wolfe awoke Mrs. Oliver Grinnell to report that Rawlings was spending the night with Maxwell Perkins (Bigelow 35). Rawlings thought that the adventure, regardless of Wolfe’s misunderstanding of her interest in suicide and her breach of social decorum, was “grand.” She added that she “wouldn’t have missed it” (137–38). After seeing Wolfe eat, she yearned to cook Wolfe and Perkins a “Ritz dinner” if Perkins went to visit Wolfe in his cabin at Oteen, about eighty miles from her summer home in Banner Elk, North Carolina.

Memories of this escapade with Wolfe and Perkins surely added pain to the news that Robert Frost carried to her later in Florida about Wolfe’s decision to leave Scribner’s. She told Perkins that “Robert Frost and I both take it [Wolfe’s signing with Harper’s] as a very menacing sign for Wolfe himself” (150). Her probable reason was her belief that Perkins helped Wolfe see the need for greater discipline as an artist. Or it could be that her sense of loyalty led her to see Wolfe’s act as a breach of friendship, for she knew how deep Perkins’s feelings for Wolfe ran.

Recognition of the bond between the two men stands behind her words of comfort to Perkins when she learned of Wolfe’s death. Her letter of consolation followed her reading of a copy of Wolfe’s last letter to Perkins:

I have grieved for you ever since I heard of Tom’s death. I grieve, too, for the certain loss of the work he would unquestionably have done, for his very touching letter to you shows a chastening and mellowing

of that great half-mad diffusive ego, that would have been a guarantee of the literary self-discipline we all so wanted for him. . . .

I know how glad you must be that you never withdrew your personal goodness from Tom, even when others were bitter for you. (Rawlings, *Letters* 159.)

Wolfe's death touched her in a way that expressed her own vitally vigorous code of life: "It is strange that so vibrant and sentient a personality as Tom knew or guessed that he had come to the great wall. He must have felt far beyond most of us that withdrawing of the cosmic force from the individual unit of life" (159). Her belief in vitalism easily matched Wolfe's.

Wolfe's attempt to defend his right to draw creatively from his own experiences when Marjorie Dorman sued him for his depiction of her in *From Death to Morning* recurred to Rawlings when a neighbor and friend, Zelma Cason, took her to court for "invasion of privacy" on the basis of Rawlings's description of her in *Cross Creek*. As she explained in a letter to the editor of *Time*, the case was important for all writers: "A vital principle is involved: the right of anyone to write of his or her own life, where that necessarily involves mention of other people, short, of course, of libel. If a local jury had decided against me in this, it would seem that not only would all autobiography become immediately taboo, but that freedom of the press in its wider aspects might be curtailed'" (Bigelow 45). Thinking of Wolfe's insistence on having his case go before a jury, Rawlings told Perkins: After my experience, hard as it was, I think Tom Wolfe and any other writer ought to fight any such suit" (286).

Even as she was drawing upon her life for *Cross Creek* and wanting to use one of the pieces she planned to put in it as a vehicle for some comments on issues of the day (problems brought on by the Depression), Perkins was counseling her not to forget her vocation and turn her "material to an immediate purpose. In a way, that was one of the issues between me and Tom, and I kept telling him that what he felt would come through his writing, even though not specifically stated. And yet he wanted at that time to be a Communist, the last thing that he truly was, as his last book shows. With you too, what you mean comes through your writing, and don't let anything tempt you into the lists of controversy" (180). For Rawlings, as for Wolfe, when politics entered the scene, Perkins retreated from his most basic principle that the work of the editor should primarily be matters of business rather than creativity. A writer of fiction should not take to the stump or soap box in his or her own person. On that issue, Perkins was willing to go to the wall.

He was not always so firm when it came to standing behind his request for cuts. As he and Wolfe argued over a large chunk that Perkins wanted Wolfe to remove from *Of Time and the River*, Wolfe found that he could relieve the tension of the moment by calling to his aid something that Rawlings had once given Perkins. Perkins's account of the clash and its humorous resolution is too good not to quote in full:

Once I argued for a big deletion, late on a hot night, and then sat in silence. I knew he must agree to it, for the reasons were strong. Tom tossed his head about, and swayed in his chair, and his eyes roved over the office. I went on reading in the manuscript for not less than fifteen minutes, but I was aware of Tom's movements—aware at last that he was looking fixedly at one corner of the office. In that corner hung a winter hat and overcoat, and down from under the hat, along the coat hung a sinister rattlesnake skin with seven rattles—a present from Marjorie Rawlings. I looked at Tom. He was eyeing the group of objects, and the rattlesnake stood out. He waved his hand at them: "Aha!" said Tom, "the portrait of an editor." (Quoted by Nowell 231)

Regrettably, Wolfe chose not to share this moment of hilarity when he wrote *The Story of a Novel*. Rawlings would surely have howled over it.

Rawlings confessed that Wolfe's story of *Of Time and the River* brought much upheaval as she read it. Despite its painful effect on her, she saw in it and in Wolfe something important and enduring. The experience of reading Wolfe's account of how he had wrestled with the novel and had been rescued from despair by Perkins's belief in him and his patient willingness to help him through his maze of ideas and drafts touched Rawlings deeply, for she, too, had learned how to draw upon Perkins's strengths:

Wolfe's "Story of a Novel" is unbearable. I have just finished it. It's unbearable—its honesty,—its fierceness,—its beauty of expression. And for another writer—

There is no damnation for such a man. Don't be concerned [she told Perkins]—I know you are not—that he goes "completely off the reservation." He is his own torment and strength.

He is so young! When a little of the torment has expended itself, you will have the greatest artist America has ever produced. (Rawlings, *Letters* 107–08)

She had experienced enough artistic *angst* herself before hitting her creative stride to realize that literary triumphs lay ahead for Wolfe if he could learn to expend his talents more wisely. Her counsel to Perkins was that he should patiently

endure Wolfe's Byronic excesses but to keep his blue-pencil ready just in case Wolfe never honed his own critical abilities to a mature level.

The artistry and maturity she was looking for came in "I Have a Thing to Tell You." In a note to Perkins that she requested be sent on to Wolfe, Rawlings wrote (24 April 1937):

The Thomas Wolfe "I Have a Thing to Tell You" was sheer triumph. He has gained immeasurably by the self-imposed restraint, and all the old beauty and rhythm and emotion are enhanced by it. Then when he does break loose with one of his magnificent lyricisms, the effect is heart-breaking, like the exquisite melody in the sternness of a symphony. Thank you for sending it. It is indeed an important document, both as a milestone in Wolfe's work, and as a social document (bms Am 1883.1 [536]).

Outspoken as she was about Wolfe's stylistic shortcomings and immaturity, Rawlings never paused to tell Perkins what she admired about Wolfe's work. Her probable reasons are not far to seek. Like Wolfe, she had a Rabelaisian gusto for life, enjoying as much as he did the pleasures of good food and drink. She was of the earth, earthy, relishing the humor, energy, and frankness of working people and sharing their hopes for better times for themselves and their nation. She also expressed herself best when she could report her impression of life through the eyes of a youthful character, filling her pages with sensuous images noted for their freshness and poetic rhythms. Finally, her values were close to those of Wolfe, both of them taking their places as followers of Walt Whitman's notion that the artist is the voice of his unlettered brothers in the teeming democracy that makes up our nation. Rawlings would find herself at her best artistically when she gave artistic permanence to her Florida Crackers just as Wolfe was at his best when he treated the mountain folk of western North Carolina. In Wolfe, she saw a model for bringing regional characters and modes of living into a literature aspiring to reach a universal audience.

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Symbols and Symptoms

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Given the opportunity to address the relationship of medicine to literature, my response was immediate, positive, and heartfelt. I welcomed the chance to acknowledge my debt to literature, which accounts for much of what is highest and best in my life. Later, in the sessions of sweet, silent thought, faced with a blank page and a reluctant pencil, I wondered if my acceptance might have been a bit hasty. There must be other ways, I reflected, to repay one's debts. And what could I say about the context of humanity in which science serves medicine that has not been more profoundly expressed by C. P. Snow, Peter Medawar, and perhaps a half-dozen others? But withdrawing from an agreement joined would, I decided, be more painful than finding new bottles for old wine, so I continued my search for a text.

Finally, I decided to look backward, hoping the glow of the past would illuminate the road ahead. I reread an address I had given to a class of medical students in 1967, in which I cautioned them not to let their humanism be cancelled by a more rapidly evolving science—apprehension then, overarching reality today. True, the ball park has changed, and the rules are different now, but the “facts” upon which we base decisions have always been fleeting. Just as you can never step into the same river twice, truth does go marching on, and lasting solutions are elusive. But the absence of any final answer to the decline of humanism in medicine should not prevent a search for higher ground, nor from acknowledging that our preoccupation with scientific methodologies has all but routed humanistic and philanthropic concerns; and, since each advance must be managed by an even more sophisticated technology, the imbalance between public and self interest is likely to increase. So captivated are we by the prospect of the next technological triumph that too little thought is given to the role of the last one. As a result of what can be done, health care expectations are unrealistically inflated; in fact,

we have so titillated the public with a display of methodological muscle that failure to cure has become tantamount to breaking the law. But complete health care for every American is no longer an option. Given rising economic and ecological limitations, the choice is not whether, but how, medical care is to be rationed. What then can be done to provide physicians with the sense and sensitivity to make these complex ethical decisions?

Scientific knowledge alone is insufficient. The skill of a physician relates to his ability to give a specific fact appropriate dimension and location within the context of an entire person. But the application of scientific data to the human condition requires greater educational diversity than is provided in conventional curricula. Undergraduates simply do not maintain their horizontal dimension long enough. Baccalaureate education should bring students to a level of scientific understanding befitting a medical student, although such sophistication does not require four years of chemistry. Of particular concern are elective courses, which too often are chosen to fatten grade point averages or to ease the transition to medical school. I have no quarrel with—would, in fact, support strongly—those who seek in science a rigorous and disciplined education; but rigor and discipline are hallmarks of scholarship in other subjects as well. The answers in nonscientific fields may be less precise or conclusive, but the search for truth is no less rigorous or demanding. Medicine itself is an inexact science. Normal is never a point but a range, and most patients have problems for which there are no single, perfect answers.

Of particular value to prospective physicians are courses that stress concepts and principles, logic and analysis, and metaphoric activity. Analysis—essential for the practitioner—separates, and emphasizes differences; metaphor—critical for those who create—relates, and stresses similarities. History and poetry courses are also relevant, not so much to master dates or couplets as to obtain a sense of history and poetry. Philosophy is vital because it invokes logic, ethics, and morality in a search for truth. Nor should a general education omit courses in self-expression, such as public speaking and expository writing. Unfortunately, basic reading and writing skills have been pushed aside by social and behavioral science and by the substitution of pictures for words. And how can Latin and Greek, which always struggled for a place in the curriculum, hold their own against the glamour of computer science and other quick-fix, vocationally-oriented courses? Lacking the concision of expression afforded by an exposure to Latin grammar, words (and more words) seem to have become a substitute for thought rather than a means of expressing it.

My first encounter with the phrase “medicine and literature” occurred when I was advised, as a third year medical student, to read the “literature” on a particular topic. Until that time, my associations with the word “literature” involved the spires of Oxford and the high poetry of Milton and Dante. Certainly the word did not have medical connotations, although as I became better acquainted with such works as *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and *Religio Medici*, I realized that the phrase “medical literature” was neither an oxymoron nor a crime against nature. I’m still a little uneasy about public meetings of the two, feeling somewhat like Chekhov that my lawful wife is medicine and literature my mistress, and it is just as well to keep the two apart in polite society.

The differences are obvious: literature is subjective and fanciful—a matter of taste; medicine is objective and rational—a matter of fact. In medicine ideas must be verified before they can be accepted. Literature is more comfortable with ideas that may never be proven, realizing perhaps that the meaning of life does not lie in DNA sequences.

Similarities are less conspicuous, but both literature and medicine seek a fundamental understanding of humanity. There is no profession, other perhaps than the ministry, that deals more with mankind in moments of birth, trouble, illness, and death than medicine. Therefore, understanding humanity is not only relevant, but critical; and whatever part of that understanding is learned must be derived from personal and vicarious experience. Since our personal contacts with illness and bereavement are limited, we must rely on the descriptions of others for additional insight into the human condition. Through the sadness and joy, the tragedy and triumph, of its characters, literature provides such diverse and humanizing moments. Indeed, the best literature is the most varied and far-ranging. Consider the diversity of character and event in the works of such literary giants as Shakespeare and Tolstoy. Those authors with only one story to tell (although they may tell it many times) are comparable to the physician fixed in a highly specialized technology who, lacking flexibility, makes patients fit procedures rather than tailoring procedures to the needs of a patient.

Of course most of us do not start reading literature for its humanizing value. We read for the enchantment and the stories, to escape boredom or some unpleasantness in life. “Once upon a time” are among the most evocative and best-remembered words of childhood and still convey for many of us a sense of magical and faraway adventure.

Another similarity is that both medicine and literature tell a story: the physician’s history is a tale of disorder, disease, and death. From the writer’s view, these occurrences are woven into the tapestry of everyday life. It may not be coincidental

that the decline in the art of medical history-taking has coincided with a diminishing interest in good literature.

Authors and physicians may appear to use different tools: authors employ symbols, physicians rely on symptoms. But are they not much the same? The term "symbol," as first used by the Greeks, referred to our original wholeness, later broken, now forever sought. Symptoms, too, reflect an incompleteness for which we seek relief. Both may be as obvious as the representation of a country by its flag or a sprained ankle by pain. At other times, however, both symbols and symptoms have been passed subconsciously through filters of emotion, attitude, lifestyle, stress, and guilt. Placing these symbols and symptoms in context and understanding their full meaning may require some detective work, but therein lie the real challenges of medical diagnosis or literary comprehension. Contact with subconscious meanings in literature makes us more aware of their existence in patients. In this sense, literature enlarges our sensitivities and our imagination; it may not help us listen, but it enables us to hear better.

The creative process is also similar for writers and scientists. Although creation in scientific fields must deal with a larger body of technology and fact between creative insight and its expression, the flash of illumination that springs from what Henry James called "the unconscious well of celebration" occurs in both. The "Eureka!" of Archimedes as he stepped into the bathtub resulted from sudden, unconscious connections similar to the spontaneous apposition of thought and feeling that produced a Wordsworthian ode. Thus, although the proportions may vary, great writers, like great physicians, reach fundamental truth through conscious and unconscious distillation of many separate observations; the power of these truths depends upon the clarity and wholeness of the observations. Unfortunately, most of us tend to use, or favor, only a particular part of our sensory equipment; but our powers of observation may be increased by using all our senses. Literature reaches the senses through the mind and thus has the broadest application to the human condition; but music and art also have benefit: music makes us aware of variations in sound, cadence, and rhythm, and art heightens our consciousness of form and color. Thus, literature, music, and art add to science by giving greater depth and force to the physician's observations. With the intensified sensibilities resulting from full use of our faculties, the faces of disease literally jump out of a crowd. So prepared, one may identify many abnormalities of form and function with no more equipment than a park bench.

I have now been asked why I teach a course in literature often enough to have developed an almost reflexive answer: smiling enigmatically I say that it

gives me the opportunity to fulfill a socially acceptable fantasy. Most, hearing that, nod uneasily, murmur something like "Oh, I see," and move on. Others, determined to get to the bottom of this incongruous incongruity, continue with "But why Thomas Wolfe?" "Why not?" is, I have learned, a rather unsatisfying response; so I go on, feeling more and more as though I had been asked a no-win question like "When did you stop beating your wife?" My defense, which has become more elaborate with time, continues with "After all, somebody should be teaching him, since he is arguably this university's most prestigious literary graduate." Then quickly, as I see "But why you?" forming on their lips, I add "Thomas Wolfe has great appeal to the emotions and senses of the college-age student; he offers them an unusual exposure to language, literary styles, cultural and social history, and, for many, to the state in which they live." For any who are still listening I say that "The English language is in a state of decline; if Gibbon were alive today and his interest the demise of language, he would be taking notes like crazy." Finally, exhausted, but no longer apologetic, I suggest that "Pictures are replacing words in our society, and this course is my vote for the written word over its pictorial representation."

To the medical students, I point out that medicine is not limited to the repair of mechanical parts; that methodological approaches are like sex manuals: the larger pleasure is lost in preoccupation with technique. The biological aspects of medicine must be applied in the context of understanding and morality. The fact that one dies of his entire life, not just of his disease, does not mean that literature should be substituted for science in medicine; rather, their effect should be additive, so that literature gives increased meaning to the physician's observations. Literature is a window on life that promotes understanding, enhances communication, and keeps tradition and memory alive. It instructs our science by providing a sense of wholeness, thus balancing the forces of specialization, which tend to focus on parts rather than people. Once a patient becomes a disembodied organ or specimen, at that very moment, he ceases being an individual.

Good literature goes even further; it has the power to show rather than simply tell us what happened. Flaubert's portrayal of a country surgeon's disastrous attempts to correct a clubfoot illustrates more vividly than any lecture the critical importance of knowledge and skill to the art of healing. And certainly there is no textbook description that portrays the ugliness, beauty, and power of death more graphically than the deaths of Ben and W.O. Gant in *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River*. How, why, or even if, these deaths move you is a reflection of something in you: a brother who died, an unfulfilled life, or simply not having a brother or knowing one's father. Both deaths emphasize

that disease exists in the context of people. It is woven into the life, emotions, and thoughts of human beings—and those around them—a context, incidentally, that was largely lost when doctors stopped making house calls. For the reason that each patient is an individual, the response to his disease is unique and requires more than a knowledge of the disorder itself for its complete understanding. Similarly varied are the effects of illness and death on family and friends; some, like those in *Tell Me a Riddle* and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, are driven apart by a dying relative; others are drawn together “in the final communion of death” so powerfully depicted by Thomas Wolfe in the deaths of his brother and father. Thus, the vicarious experiences of literature enable the physician to infuse objective thought and action with greater empathy for the impact of disease or death, not just upon organs or patients, but also on the lives of those around them. Physicians may never know the full meaning of existence, or of the life we try so hard to prolong and protect, but we must keep searching for it all along the way—and with all the sense and sensitivity we can command.





Thomas Wolfe and Hugh Holman: Author and Critic

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Today I want to talk of two people I admire. I suspect most of you do too, or you probably wouldn't be here. The first is Thomas Wolfe; the second is Hugh Holman.

Even as a very young man Thomas Wolfe had the sensibility, the talent, and the will both to envision and to articulate his dream of an Edenic world filled with beauty and truth and love—always beckoning, always enthralling—and then to measure his everyday reality in terms of that impossible dream. His vision simply developed and carried to a higher power that idealistic future which lives in the minds of so many young people in all ages and in all places. And Hugh Holman had the critical acumen and the common sense to value Wolfe's articulation at its true worth as literary art and even perhaps to risk his critical reputation on the belief that he could justify that evaluation before his community of scholarly peers.

Hugh Holman, like so many of us, came to Wolfe early, responded with excessive youthful exuberance, turned away for a time, then returned in later years with a more mature appreciation of Wolfe's accomplishments as a writer and a more clear-minded admission of his frequent excesses. In his introduction to *The Loneliness at the Core*, Holman wrote of how he revolted against his earlier infatuation with Wolfe's work:

I greeted Wolfe's work originally with a tremendous sense of its authority and power. I came by the late forties to feel when I looked back upon the Wolfe novels for which I had such enthusiasm a faint sense of embarrassment that my artistic judgment had not been better and that I had swallowed so many badly conceived, bombastically expressed passages

and poorly constructed works with the belief that they were wonderful art. (Page xvii.)

But Holman goes on to say

It was not until I had the opportunity to reexamine *Look Homeward, Angel* for a "Reappraisal: 1955" series for the *New Republic* that I was led seriously to look again at Wolfe as an artist. What I saw persuaded me that he had been a writer of enormous talent and substantial accomplishment without blinding me to the fact that he was also a writer of remarkably limited self-criticism and poor artistic judgment. (Page xvii.)

That pattern was repeated, I suspect, by many of us here. It certainly was my own experience. In 1950, when the Korean War erupted, the bomber unit I was assigned to was sent to our forward base in England. Lonely without my family, I would spend much spare time, on and off duty, reading anything available. One of the books available in our small base exchange store was a twenty-five-cent Penguin edition of Thomas Wolfe's *Short Stories*, and I plunged into it without having a clue who this Thomas Wolfe was or what his writing was about. The book contains seven selections familiar to us as they appear in *From Death to Morning*, plus *The Story of a Novel*. The book is organized into three sections, the first entitled "Childhood and Carolina." When I saw "Carolina" and read the brief biographical squib on the back cover, my interest quickened. Here was a writer from my native state. But the second group of stories entitled "Maturity and Brooklyn" was what hooked me. That group included "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn," "Death the Proud Brother," and "Gulliver." The first of these caught my eye chiefly because my bride had been born in Brooklyn. But "Death the Proud Brother" was to me a devastation. I had never read anything that affected me so powerfully. Perhaps death, even at that young age, was something of an obsession with us who had lived through World War II and now Korea under its constant shadow. At any rate I felt instant affinity with this powerful mind that could evoke in such magnificent rhetoric the inchoate feelings I had at that time. It was as if my own heart had poured out those impassioned words. Thomas Wolfe became my secret sharer from the night I read that piece.

It was not until six years later that my chance came for graduate school at the University of North Carolina to get a master's degree and teach in the English Department at the newly formed Air Force Academy in Colorado. One of my first courses at Chapel Hill was the American Novel under Hugh Holman. It was my favorite among all the courses I took during that exciting first semester in graduate school. I formed an admiration for Hugh Holman that developed

into a friendship which was to last as long as he lived—and will last as long as I live. I asked if he would direct my master's thesis and he agreed, but I had no clear idea for a proper topic. I didn't even know how to go about finding one. I do remember, though, proposing Thomas Wolfe as a subject—and I distinctly remember Holman saying in effect, "There really is little interest in Wolfe's work within the academic community and I don't think there is much work left to do that's worth doing on the man or his works." I say this only to illustrate that at that time—spring of 1956—Holman apparently did not have a very high opinion of Wolfe's writings, except for *Look Homeward, Angel*, and did not believe a master's thesis on him was an appropriate project. I remember being a bit disappointed at his reaction, but it shouldn't have surprised me.

Looking back over my class notes from his American Novel course—and I tried to take copious, almost verbatim notes from those professors whom I most respected—I find several passages which reveal Holman's estimate of Wolfe at that time. For some reason that I don't know, he had selected *You Can't Go Home Again* as the twelfth and last novel to be taught in the course. (It was a busy, busy semester, and reading twelve novels—including such tomes as Melville's *Moby Dick*, Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, and Henry James's *The Ambassadors*—was almost literally a blinding experience.) Maybe Holman put Wolfe's novel last because he thought he might get behind and not quite have time to deal with all twelve of the novels he had projected. He may have thought *You Can't Go Home Again* was a good one to leave out if time pressed too insistently. Certainly he did not put it last because he considered it a climactic culmination for the course.

My notes reveal a few reasons why I think this: "*You Can't Go Home Again* is not a novel. A product of editor's work after Wolfe's death." Then a revealing parenthetical note "(Holman thinks Aswell a bad editor. Take *Web and Rock* and original manuscript and re-edit. This would benefit Wolfe.)" Those comments—and I'm sure they are, if not verbatim quotations, at least close and accurate paraphrasings of Holman's class lecture—reveal the germs of critical ideas which he was to pursue and refine during the next twenty-five years of his critical reappraisal of Wolfe's works.

Another note reads: "Wolfe a good writer but wrote but one good book. That was *Look Homeward, Angel*." Remember, Holman had just returned to that book for his contribution to the *New Republic* reappraisal series. He had also remarked in that class lecture (the date was Monday, 21 May 1956): "*Look Homeward, Angel* was patterned on Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Like Stephen Daedalus, he (Wolfe) cut loose. . . . He borrowed from Joyce and Proust, whose influences are significant." Here Holman reveals his awareness

of Wolfe as a writer of educated taste and high standards. Then the lecture continues with this passage: "Wolfe tried to describe a world, America. (He was) a gargantuan romantic. He would experience all, then record it as his own emotional experience. (He is) intensely subjective. His assumption: if he can describe himself he has described all men. He is the true romantic—akin to English Romantic poets. A highly rhetorical writer. (His) great gifts: first, abnormal sensitivity—but (he was) not imaginative. He had to experience it, (he) could not imagine it. Second, (his) peculiar gift for rhetorical style, (his) ability to describe emotion." Then Holman contrasted Wolfe with Hemingway: "Wolfe was directly opposite to Hemingway. He (Wolfe) would describe the emotion so that the reader would recognize it if experienced. (Hemingway) evokes emotion; (Wolfe) describes it."

It was plain, even then, that though Holman recognized and appreciated Wolfe's rhetorical talents, he preferred Hemingway's style and methods. That preference is confirmed by one of the last notes from that final lecture of the American Novel course: "Wolfe progresses from sensation to emotion by describing the emotion—almost a sentimentality. He is a recorder of his own emotional state." One final note is the last I recorded in the whole course: "Holman thinks some of Wolfe's best writing is in the description of the fire." That note refers, of course, to Wolfe's depiction of the apartment fire in the party at Jack's in *You Can't Go Home Again*. That episode is indeed a powerful objective evocation, relying less on rhetorical commitment than on precise yet resonantly provocative narration; it not only presents the dramatic scene but successfully evokes both the personal and the social implications of the fire in the lives of all the characters involved. It is surely one of Wolfe's finest episodes.

During the 25 years between the first American novel course in 1956 and his death in 1981, Hugh and I spent many hours together both here in Chapel Hill and during his visits to Colorado. We often discussed his work on Thomas Wolfe and once, as we stopped on beautiful Wilkerson Pass west of Colorado Springs at a spot overlooking range on range of majestic snow-capped mountains to the west, Hugh remarked how the scene would have impressed Wolfe and how Wolfe would surely have written of it had he been able to share our view.

From 1956, Hugh was to go on in his career to explore in increasing depth and with increasing admiration the strengths of Wolfe as a writer. Five years later, in 1961, he edited and published *The Short Novels of Thomas Wolfe*, that most striking demonstration of his developing conviction that Wolfe was not just a flawed genius but a conscious and skillful literary artist capable of achieving precise and concise artistic form in his work. On a visit to Chapel Hill in 1960,

I took notes of a conversation with Hugh about Wolfe. One of my notes reads, "Wolfe was at his best in 20,000 to 40,000 word pieces. Both Wolfe and the reader get lost in his novels. He is often magnificent in shorter works." In essay after essay, Hugh developed this idea and demonstrated its validity. The critical task he set for himself becomes obvious as one reviews the body of his Wolfean criticism.

It was a two-fold task: first, to examine and explicate Wolfe's work in such a way as to point out the real gold in the ore of Wolfe's often badly flawed published books, to show the genuine artistry, the skill, the painstaking revision that so often was obscured in the massive volumes of the published material. And second, once he had established Wolfe as a writer not only of substance and power but also of artistic talent that deserved respect, Hugh set out to place Wolfe and his work firmly in the context of that "Southern Renaissance" into which he believed Wolfe belonged, and ultimately in the context of American literature as a whole.

The first part of this two-fold critical task—establishing Wolfe as a literary artist—Hugh accomplished in such essays as "The Loneliness at the Core," "The Stigma of Autobiography," "Rhetorical Hope and Dramatic Despair," and notably in his introduction and editing of the *Short Novels*. One of his critical insights was that the Hegelian view, the obsessive need to explore opposition and contradiction, was central to Wolfe the man and the most significant characteristic of his work. New South versus Old South, South versus North, America versus Europe, Gentile versus Jew, male versus female, home versus nomadic wandering—these are among the opposites which pervade Wolfe's writings. His obsessive concern for these contradictory elements is central to an understanding of his work—and Hugh Holman's critical essays illuminate the ways Wolfe used them in shaping his fictions.

The second part of Holman's task—placing Wolfe in the tradition of the Southern Renaissance and in the more encompassing tradition of American literature as a whole—he achieved in essays such as that early one, "The Dark, Ruined Helen of His Blood" (revised in 1975), "Thomas Wolfe: The Epic of the National Self," "The Web of the South," "The Cosmic Clock of History," "The Epic Impulse," "The Southern Provincial in Metropolis," and "The Dwarf on Wolfe's Shoulder." I believe these last two titles are the final essays Hugh ever published on Wolfe. They are included in his last volume of criticism, *Windows on the World: Essays on American Social Fiction*, published in 1979, two years before his death.

In these essays, Hugh asserted Wolfe's place as a representative Southern writer, deserving to be examined and upheld as not just a unique talent and a personal

voice but as spokesman for a whole Southern subregion—the Piedmont South. Hugh sees Wolfe in this context as embodying the attitudes and assumptions of the Piedmont South—its egalitarianism, its middle class aspirations, its drive for progress through commerce, industry, and salesmanship, its New South impatience with the Old South's concern with an agrarian-based aristocracy, its tendency to look not inward and backward to the past but outward and forward to the future. Holman points out Wolfe's frequent criticism of some of these characteristics of the Piedmont South but insists that Wolfe's perspective on his native region was the typical Wolfean concern with the oppositions and contradictions inherent in his feelings of being both a Southerner and an American. Holman points out how as an American Wolfe went on to confront the challenge of discovering his own immense land and then measuring America against the world beyond its borders.

Hugh always acknowledged his debt to Hippolyte Taine, the great French critic, and shared Taine's concern for the novel in its social and historical context rather than as an isolated artifact existing on its own terms and in its own world. Holman knew, of course, that for an author to be worth writing about he had first to be a literary artist. But he also believed the author should be placed in a tradition and should be evaluated, as T. S. Eliot so eloquently insisted in his famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in terms of his effect on the whole complex relationship combining the author, the age, and literary history. It was in these terms that Hugh made his evaluation of Thomas Wolfe.

In the 1975 book, *The Loneliness at the Core*, Hugh collected and in some cases rewrote and expanded essays he had previously published. It is rewarding to read these newly worked essays in sequence and to note the careful revisions, the placement of individual essays, the inclusion of earlier insights into a critical scheme of broader scope—in sum, to read the mature reworking of individual parts into a coherent whole—much as Thomas Wolfe often did with his fictional episodes. The volume creates a comprehensive, unified vision of the flaws and successes in Wolfe's work and ultimately of the immense value of that work as American literature.

The Loneliness at the Core is a fitting summing up of more than twenty years of thoughtful scholarship and criticism of Thomas Wolfe. It is judicious, fair-minded, temperate, yet infused with Hugh's quietly passionate conviction of the final worth of Wolfe's contribution to our literature and to our nation. There is not a harsh word in the book, for Hugh Holman, though he had to make harsh judgments in his mind, never uttered harsh words to his audience. It is a book that does justice to Hugh as a scholar, a critic, and a gentleman—and

to Thomas Wolfe as a great American author. If you've read it (and I suspect most of you have), read it again. And if you haven't read it, I commend it to you as one of the clearest critical lights ever to illuminate the work of Thomas Wolfe.

A final word on Holman and Wolfe: Every scholar who chooses to be a critic, rather than a collector and arranger of facts, ultimately reveals much about himself in the very choice of his critical subjects. He finally must take a stand, and his choice of where and by whom to stand is eloquent if implicit evidence of his own qualities of mind and heart. Hugh Holman was a fine critic and an eclectic one. He wrote extensively on many American writers—William Gilmore Simms, J. P. Marquand, Flannery O'Connor, Robert Penn Warren, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, to name a few. But he chose Thomas Wolfe as the one writer on whom to expend his most enduring and most extensive critical energies. He came to see Wolfe's works as not only worthy of serious, sustained critical interpretation but also as a body of work upon which he was willing to stake his final reputation as a scholar-critic. He saw in Wolfe's writing a depth of insight, an intensity of belief, a magnitude of talent, a range of accomplishment, and a nobility of spirit akin to his own ideal of what an American writer should be. And he labored hard and honestly—and against great odds—to elevate Wolfe and his works to a position of respect in the pantheon of American writers.

Though I say it with the subjective judgment of an admirer and a friend, I believe Hugh Holman too earned for himself a place of honor in the pantheon of great American scholars and critics. He achieved the highest possible goal of the critic. What Malcolm Cowley did for Faulkner, Hugh Holman tried to do for Wolfe. He set out to revive a dying reputation and to rekindle serious interest in an author and a body of work which we here, I think, obviously believe deserve an honored place in the long tradition of American literature. No critic can achieve a greater goal, and no critic has ever achieved it with finer judgment and better grace than Hugh Holman.





The Nowell-Aswell Letters

Mary Aswell Doll and Clara Stites

In September 1928, Elizabeth Nowell applied for a job on the editorial staff of Charles Scribner's Sons. "No women," they told her, so she went immediately downstairs to the bookstore and got a sales job in the juvenile department. By spring, she was an assistant in the art department, where she met Thomas Wolfe when he came to see the printed dummy for *Look Homeward, Angel*. Nowell describes the meeting:

His baggy brown tweed suit looked as if he'd slept in it all night; he had spots of gravy on his tie; his hair was carefully slicked down with water or some kind of goo, but he thrust his fingers through it nervously and made it all stand up awry like oily little anchovies. . . his whole-hearted friendliness, his humor, and his obvious delight in the occasion swept us all up in a contagion of good will and excitement, so that we forgot his eccentricities. (Unpublished article.)

When Nowell opened her own literary agency in 1934, Wolfe asked her to handle all of his magazine publication, and for the next four years she worked with him on his short fiction. As Wolfe turned away from Maxwell Perkins, he relied increasingly on Nowell, using her office as his mailing address and seeking her encouragement and guidance.

Although Wolfe broke with Scribner's early in 1937, it was not until November that Edward C. Aswell, assistant editor at Harper and Brothers, heard that Wolfe was looking for a new publisher. He called Nowell, who confirmed the rumors and arranged for him to meet Wolfe on Armistice Day, 11 November.

Aswell and Wolfe liked each other immediately. Aswell had read everything Wolfe had published and was fascinated by coincidences of time and place that seemed to weave his fate with Wolfe's. When Aswell offered Wolfe a contract with Harper's—for a manuscript he had not seen—he did so because, as he

wrote Nowell years later, "in my opinion, [Tom was] the greatest writer of his generation. I still think so, too."

In 1949, Aswell as administrator of the Wolfe Estate and John Hall Wheelock of Scribner's selected Elizabeth Nowell as editor for the collection of Wolfe's letters. Nowell had left New York to marry in 1941. Now divorced, she welcomed the opportunity to work for Scribner's and Wolfe again. She and Aswell began a ten-year correspondence from which today's presentation is drawn. Between 1949 and 1958, they wrote to each other sometimes twice a day, sometimes in the middle of the night, often to excess. Their letters reflect a commitment—call it obsession—to keep the memory of Wolfe's greatness alive.

This being the year of the third Wolfe biography, David Donald's *Look Homeward*, we turn to the letters about the first biography—Elizabeth Nowell's *Thomas Wolfe*—and to some of the concerns involved in putting Wolfe's life on paper. We take you back to Liddy Nowell's dining room in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts, where she did most of her work on the *Letters of Thomas Wolfe* and on the Wolfe biography; and to Ed Aswell's editorial office at McGraw-Hill, where he wrote as administrator of the estate.

We begin with a postscript to a letter Aswell wrote to Nowell (9 September 1949). Fred Wolfe has written to Aswell, worried that the publication of Wolfe's letters will discredit his family. Aswell quotes from Fred's letters: ". . . I think, so far as I am concerned, that we the members of Tom's family have a place for consideration. . . . When I mention this, I am certainly not thin skinned: I think . . . that each of us, measure up to at least, the American average family group. Tom wouldn't want us or this misunderstood, and I feel you will watch this and see we get a square deal."

The year is 1952. Nowell has been working on the letters collection for three years and is now preparing introductions to each of the chapters. She writes Aswell on 6 September:

. . . *Well, now*, are you still hoping to persuade me to do a biography of Tom some day. . . ? Because it looks as if I have been persuaded, willy nilly and somewhat against my better judgment. . . . The Expository Material alone will come out to about 160,000 words!! And it seems just plain impossible to try to jam that much into the already-too-long Letters. . . .

I have now sent Chapter IV to Jack [Wheelock] and have written him saying that I think it's time we faced this fact before I write my guts out for another year, and have asked him if they do or do not want to

give me a contract for "A Short Biography". . . . If they say yes, you and I will have to hash it out. . . .

As the guy in *Thar She Blows* didn't say, "I'd like some plain ordinary everyday Encouragement, and goddamned little of that."

Aswell responds three days later: "So you have finally come around to my idea that you ought to write a biography of Tom. Of course at the time I proposed it, I was thinking of a book for McGraw-Hill . . . but I shan't stand in your way if Scribner's say they want it. . . . I can tell you right now that if Scribner's turns out not to be interested, I very definitely am, and am prepared to give you a contract the moment you want it."

Nowell writes Aswell back on 11 September, establishing the grounds of a mutual admiration that will see them through some turbulent years ahead. She begins with a reminder:

DON'T FORGET TO WRITE MABEL [Wolfe Wheaton] ON OR BEFORE TOM'S BIRTHDAY OR SHE'LL SPIT IN YOUR EYE. Or is it fresh of me to remind you of this.

You really are a sweetie pie. I mean, of course, about the contract for a B-----y. . . . And if CSS [Scribner's] shouldn't want to give me one, I'd take you up in just about 60 seconds, but as long as it started by going with the Letters, and Jack [Wheelock] has helped me with criticism so far, and everything—oh well, you understand. . . . and bless you for so doing. . . .

(P.S.) Some babe in Abilene, Texas, is trying to do a thesis on *You Can't Go Home Again* and wrote me as Mrs. Elizabeth Nowell Scribner, care of Scribner's. I told her that she flattered me, but that she'd have to consult you about research into Tom's stuff, etc. I don't think she's much good. . . ."

Besides having to deal with Wolfe's relatives and with the quantity and disorganization of Wolfe's papers, Aswell and Nowell had to deal with their own often differing interpretations of Thomas Wolfe. In curbing Wolfe's critics, for instance, Aswell felt he was acting in the best interests of the estate and the Wolfe family. But he was also acting on his own behalf, keeping alive the Thomas Wolfe that he knew and idolized. Nowell, as Wolfe's first biographer, felt an obligation to literary history. A typical issue confronts them in 1953. Professor Oscar Cargill has written an introduction to an edition of letters between Homer Andrew Watt and Thomas Wolfe. Cargill's introduction is critical of Wolfe, and Aswell objects angrily. He writes a white-hot response to Cargill and sends a draft of the letter to Nowell.

This is her response (19 March 1953):

I guess it's more or less a question of how much each of us admired Tom, and I think that maybe the degree of unconditioned admiration may depend upon what stage of life we knew him in. I think that you admired him more than I did, and that my lesser degree of admiration comes from the fact that I knew him when he was still in the Eugene Gant-y state. . . . in the last couple of years of his life I was constantly delighted and impressed by how tremendously he had improved in his relationships. . . .

But, by this same token, I think the people who knew him in the NYU period admired him much less: in fact disliked him. From all the letters and other evidence I can put together, he was pretty un-likeable in those days. . . .

Well . . . we can't dun into Cargill our own interpretation. But I don't think you really need to. And, honestly, Ed, although I think *this is a fine letter*, I think it is written at too white-hot heat. And I think that you would too, if you could either talk to Cargill, or could get him to answer you without making him mad as a wet hen first. . . .

God! Ed! The thought occurred to me that you might object with the same devoted (Bless you) heat to some of the things I am having to say about Tom in my own "commentary." There are things, like some details of Tom's behavior to M.E.P. [Perkins] and Mrs. B which I can't whitewash. But I've tried hard in every instance to explain why Tom did them—why he was impelled to do them. And wherever possible, I've tried to use Tom's own words as explanation and justification of them. . . .

Aswell's response to Nowell is typical of their relationship. He recognizes, through her tactful prodding, the unsuitability of his remarks (25 March 1953):

You are quite right in saying the letter I drafted to Professor Cargill was written in white-hot heat, and I am now quite glad that I did not send it. . . .

I think I have wasted far too much time and energy over this matter, but it has caused me great concern, for I think I have never been put in quite so uncomfortable and untenable a position.

Please don't think that I fail to understand that the Tom Wolfe I knew was a very different person from the Tom Wolfe of the early days. Of course in your book you are going to have to deal with the man in all his phases. That is not only legitimate but necessary. The New York University project is a wholly different thing since it was conceived by

Watt as a memorial to Tom and has taken the unexpected direction of a very nasty attack on him.

As Wolfe's first biographer, Nowell had to juggle the various and contradictory interpretations of her subject. She also had to juggle the question of contracts. In her fourth year of research, she finds herself caught between two publishing firms—McGraw-Hill and Scribner's, where her friend Charles Scribner III has died and been replaced by his son. Both houses have expressed interest in her work but neither has come forward with a contract. On Nowell's forty-ninth birthday—10 June 1953—this practical question assumes center stage:

I realize that I am asking an awful lot of you, but, to quote from the letters of T. W., "I am in terrible trouble, and I need a friend." You pretty much persuaded me to undertake this damned Biography, and if it is ever going to come to anything, we are going to have to "pull together" (again I quote T.W.). If neither Scribner's nor McGraw-Hill wants it, I thought of trying the Harvard University Press. But you, as the administrator of the Wolfe Estate, would have to read it and approve or disapprove of it at any rate. So how about it?

Next thing I write is going to be *By Myself, About Myself, and Purely Fictitious*. If I ever get through this Biography mess and am still alive.

Aswell, in some puzzlement, responds, evidently not remembering an earlier discussion on the matter (29 June 1953):

Your change of plan—that is your decision not to incorporate what you have recently been writing in the Volume of Letters, is news to me. The decision seems right. So let me say immediately that I am tremendously interested in publishing your biography of Tom. . . .

Your situation with Scribner's appears to be rather complicated and I am not sure that I wholly understand it, for you seem to have offered them first chance at the Biography as a separate book, at the same time, reserving to yourself the right to decline their offer if they make one. I gather this means you are so unsure of the new regime there that you would no longer feel entirely happy if perhaps Scribner's published the book. It seems to me, therefore, that the first thing you need to do is clear your lines with Scribner's.

Nowell responds, reiterating her concerns about leaving Scribner's for McGraw-Hill (7 July 1953):

Just between you and me, my decision to publish the biographical material (if possible) as a separate biography is no sudden "change of decision"

as you thought. I had pretty much decided to do so last September when I asked Scribner's for a contract and got a kick in the teeth from C.S. IV [Charles Scribner, Jr.] instead. But since I did get the kick in the teeth, and since I could not be sure until I have written the thing that it would be over the 80,000 word limit for possible inclusion with the Letters, and since I had every legal and ethical right to defer my definite decision till I'd written the biographical material and found out how long it would be, I decided to defer same instead of going off half-cocked. . . .

I mean, Ed, that neither you as administrator of the Wolfe Estate nor I as editor of the Letters and author of a Biography, can afford to get in an out-and-out row with C.S. IV. Because we need his good will for the publication of the Letters. And because we also need his consent to the quotation in the Biography of a great many things which he controls. . . .

Also, I am constantly haunted by a vision of Tom and Perkins sitting in a celestial counterpart of Chatham Walk, and shaking their heads over their seventh ambrosia-martinis, and saying: "It's too bad: Miss Nowell *means* well, but she *didn't get us right!*"

You and I have been damn close friends on all this Wolfe business now for 15—count 'em—years. And when Tom went to you, and later when Perkins died and I wrote Fred and Mabel suggesting that Tom would have wanted you as his next executor, I certainly meant to support you with my whole heart. Moreover, it was you, and nobody but you, who convinced me that I could actually write a Biography. It took you a long time to do it, but if you hadn't planted the idea in my head, and watered it and given it Vigoro at intervals, I never would have dreamed of attempting same.

Reality intrudes again in the form of a comment from Mabel Wolfe Wheaton about the death of John Terry, who was supposedly writing the "official" Wolfe biography. In a postscript to a 1953 Bastille Day letter, Aswell can't resist sharing Mabel's gossip:

P.S. Here is something you will appreciate. Last Monday I telegraphed both Mabel and Fred to let them know of Terry's death and the plans for his funeral in Rockingham, North Carolina. Knowing they had always liked Terry and knowing the Wolfe fondness for a good funeral, I assumed they would want to attend. Mabel telephoned me at home . . . and wanted to know all the bloody details, which I gave her. I also told her that the body had already been cremated and that the ashes were being shipped to Rockingham. At this point Mabel said, and I quote her words exactly

because I am not likely ever to forget them: "That spoils the fun for me. I always like to see the body."

But the other reality of contracts and publishing deadlines continues to haunt Nowell—especially as she has received no comment from Aswell on the biography chapters she has sent him for approval. When, instead of a reaction to her work he writes a letter about Perkins and Terry, she realizes she must jolt him into action. She does this by speaking plainly on their differing styles (20 November 1953):

I WISH NOW, MORE DESPERATELY THAN EVER, THAT YOU'D READ MY BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL AS FAR AS I HAVE GONE.

Ed, now this is what is so hard to say. I think that you, beneath your quiet, calm exterior, are a very whole-hearted and emotional kind of guy. And I know that you were and are 100% devoted to Tom and to his memory. And I think that when you read anything which is not entirely favorable to him, or which deviates in the slightest from his own sincere but somewhat emotional account of his affairs, you get terribly upset, almost as upset as he himself used to do. Please don't think I am criticizing you for this. I think it is wonderful. . . . But this very same wonderful devotion may make you upset at portions of what I've written, where I deviate even in the slightest from Tom's own account of how things were.

I do not mean by that that I am either deliberately or unconsciously writing a thing which is unfavorable to Tom. . . . But I am trying like all hell to write an *impartial* biography, and I think you are very *partial* to Tom. . . .

In other words, there is Tom's truth, and Perkins's truth and your truth, and my truth. . . .

Aswell responds (9 December 1953):

I have just finished reading your long and wonderful letter begun on November 20 and finished at eleven p.m. on December 2. To paraphrase Perkins, I think you have got me a little wrong. Yes, I am partial to Tom and so are you, but that does not mean that neither of us is capable of looking at him dispassionately. He was certainly a strong and wonderful and contradictory and infinitely complex person. In thinking about him I often remind myself of the fable of the seven blind men and the elephant, for I know that many of the people who knew Tom saw him in different lights and it is not that one group was right and the other group wrong. I think the ultimate truth, if it could ever be arrived at, would show that all of the views were right in one way or another, and all of them

added up to the real truth about Tom, just as the separate colors in the spectrum add up to what we call light. All I am saying, I guess, is that I am not expecting you to write a partial biography of Tom or one that I should necessarily wholly agree with.

The year is 1956. Nowell has completed ten chapters of the biography and hopes to make a 1957 publication deadline. She feels the pressure of time partly because she regrets the censorship placed on other scholars while her biography is in preparation and partly because she has cancer and her health is failing rapidly. Aswell is also suffering the stresses of personal hardship. In June he was fired from McGraw-Hill and after a two-month transition period has now begun work at Doubleday. Nowell waits for her Doubleday contract, but by October there is still no decision from Aswell or the Doubleday lawyers. Desperate, she issues this ultimatum (17 October 1956):

Ed, do you remember the old story about the child who said: "I want a white rabbit and I want it NAOOW"? Well, at exactly 2 AM after the evening I talked with you, I suddenly awoke and thought "Goddamnit, I still want my contract and I want it *NOW*". . . . This seemingly endless delay about the contract drives me wild and wakes me up at night. Moreover when I try to work on the Biography and write immortal prose about Tom's reasons for leaving Scribners, all I can think is "Goddamnit, what the hell am I batting out my brains to write this stuff for anyway when I don't know what is going to happen to it!" And the whole thing rises up in a welter of uncertainty and impatience and desperation, and I get nothing done.

. . . I signed the contract with McGraw-Hill and you as their editor, in good faith, and I accepted the advance and wrote the major portion of the book in that good faith. . . . Later, when you got fired, I agreed to stick with you, still in that good faith and with your assurance that "there won't be any trouble about the contract, no matter where I go." As you probably remember, I have always been in a state of extreme anxiety about this, and now it seems as if that anxiety was justified. . . . In spite of all your joking on the phone, I have an awful feeling that I may have to . . . decline the contract which you offer me now for Doubleday, finish the Biography and give it to McGraw-Hill, for better or for worse. . . . It is my last avenue of escape from an intolerable situation, and I have every legal and contractual right to do it if I have to. . . .

By the end of 1956, a contract has been drafted. Aswell and Nowell are Doubleday editor and Doubleday author—something neither of them would have envisioned back in 1949. Nowell's biography will not be published until 1960—two

years after both of them have died. But they end their correspondence as they began it, with warm affection for each other and for the work with Wolfe that they have shared. As Aswell writes Nowell in 26 June 1958:

The one emphatic thing I want to tell you is that this biography of yours represents a terrific achievement, is consistently interesting, will add vastly to what the world knows about Tom, and will make it unnecessary for anyone else to do a job on Tom for years to come. And the circumstances under which you have performed the task you set for yourself make the achievement all the greater and nothing short of miraculous. I am terribly distressed about you, but words fail me now. I shall just hope for a more favorable report when you come down for another checkup in July.

Nowell died two months later, on 24 August, barely managing to complete her manuscript. Aswell promised (in a letter to Nowell's daughter), "Whatever needs to be done, I shall do . . . with the expectation of publishing the book next year." But on 5 November, Aswell died suddenly of a heart attack. The biography, published by Doubleday in 1960, includes Nowell's final thanks "to Edward C. Aswell, Administrator CTA of the Estate of Thomas Wolfe, for permission to quote freely from the unpublished writings of Wolfe, for his loyalty and devotion, and for his self-sacrificing expenditure of patience, strength and time."





Thomas Wolfe, *The New Yorker*, and American Humor

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During the early 1930s, the successful *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) behind him and his money from the book running low, Thomas Wolfe turned much of his attention to the writing of short fiction. Usually Wolfe is not thought of as a short story writer, largely because of the attraction of the big books—the four major novels—and his effusive style which might seem ill suited to the shorter form. Most critics have simply ignored his accomplishments in the genre; others have denigrated his efforts in short fiction.¹ Only more recently have scholars such as James D. Boyer begun a systematic examination of Wolfe's stories. Recognition of Wolfe's proficiency in the art, through slow to come, lies behind a brand new edition of his stories edited by Francis E. Skipp and introduced by James Dickey.

Write short fiction Wolfe certainly did, to the tune of some thirty-eight stories that he saw into print between 1929 and his death in 1938. Boyer, in his doctoral dissertation and several recent outstanding articles on the short stories,² has even shown convincingly how Wolfe developed steadily in the genre through three distinctive periods of creativity in the 1930s. Boyer believes that Wolfe's marked development in short fiction shows a "genuine improvement in his craft" as a whole, as he moved into the middle and later '30s ("Development" 41).

The major factor in Wolfe's development in the short story was Elizabeth Nowell, who became his magazine agent when she left the Maxim Lieber literary agency in 1933 and set up her own firm in 1934. Both Richard S. Kennedy and Boyer have written in detail about the working relationship between Nowell and Wolfe as they carved from large hunks of unused book manuscript pieces that could stand alone as stories, refining and reshaping them. Kennedy, in his

own assessment of Wolfe's growing expertise in the short story form, has said that Nowell's disciplined approach to trimming, recasting, and rewording made "a lasting impact on his writing style," causing Wolfe to become more economical of wording and more conversational than rhetorical in style (*Beyond Love* xviii).

Wolfe's stories in the 1930s found outlets in most of the major popular and literary magazines of the day, including *American Mercury*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Esquire*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Modern Monthly*, *New Republic*, *North American Review*, *Redbook*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Scribner's*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review*, some fifteen magazines in all between 1929 and 1938.

Three went to the *New Yorker*, the first of which—"Only the Dead Know Brooklyn"—is considered one of Wolfe's most successful stories. The other two are "Mr. Malone" and "E: A Recollection." The three stories are quite different in nature. "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn," a product of what Boyer labels the middle period of Wolfe's short story career ("Development" 35-38), is a city story set in Brooklyn and is filled with Brooklyn-accented street talk. "Mr. Malone" is a satiric portrait of a conceited literary critic. And "E," one of the few stories Wolfe set in London, is a faithful portrayal of an English charwoman with servile loyalty to those above her station, from employer to prince. All three stories, however, are united by a common trait that, important as it is in Wolfe's fiction, has often been overlooked—his humor.

It has taken a long time for the scholarly world to realize the significance of Wolfe's humor, about as long as to recognize and appreciate his short fiction. In the 1960s Floyd Watkins, calling for more treatment of the humor, charged, "So far the critic has managed to do little more than to quote the humor and enjoy it with Wolfe and the reader and to classify it in large and general categories such as old Southwest humor, parody, and satire" ("Thomas Wolfe" 91). To this date only two articles to my knowledge have concentrated solely on Wolfe's humor—Bruce R. McElderry, Jr.'s, "The Durable Humor of *Look Homeward, Angel*" and Paschal Reeves's "The Humor of Thomas Wolfe"—though other scholars, including Floyd Watkins, Hugh Holman, Elizabeth Evans, and Louis Rubin have commented on the significance of humor in Wolfe, and several—most notably John L. Idol, Jr.—have studied Wolfe's satire.³

McElderry, in his important article, expresses the opinion that what has "prevented recognition of Wolfe as one of the finest humorous writers in America since Mark Twain" (123) is the "Keatsian halo" that was cast around his memory because of his untimely death in the midst of his popularity. McElderry believes that *Look Homeward, Angel*, for example, should be read "not so much as the agonizing search for maturity by an adolescent genius, as for the wonderful

gallery of comic characters remembered and created from Wolfe's journey through the early years of this century" (123–24). Paschal Reeves's article has best characterized Wolfe's humor in general, relating it closely to the oral tradition, the humor of the Old Southwest, folklore humor, satire, parody, and caricature. Reeves's most significant contribution is in showing Wolfe's heavy reliance on the oral tradition in his writings and tracing his roots in Old Southwest humor, from its presence in Southern letters to its obvious place in the dynamics of his own Asheville family. Reeves stresses Wolfe's humorous narratives (especially those involving W. O. Gant) and the element of the tall tale (as best seen in *The Hills Beyond* [1941], in the likes of Zacharia Joyner). He asserts that Wolfe's "virtuosity in handling humor often rivals that of authors hailed chiefly as humorists" ("Humor" 119).

It is pertinent, then, to focus on the humor in the three stories published in the *New Yorker*, a magazine grounded on the premise that, in founding editor Herbert Ross's words, the publication be serious, but not too serious in executing its mission. "It hopes to reflect metropolitan life, to keep up with events and affairs of the day, to be gay, humorous, satirical but to be more than the jester" ("Of All Things" 2).

"Only the Dead Know Brooklyn," which Maxwell Perkins permitted Elizabeth Nowell to copy from the mass of unpublished manuscript in his possession, appeared in the *New Yorker* on 15 June 1935, and in the same year, with a minor change or two in diction, was reprinted in *From Death to Morning*. The setting of the story is Brooklyn, the characters (all unnamed) being the testy, but kind-hearted narrator; a Big Guy; a Little Guy; and another man in the crowd waiting for a train. The narrator is telling the story of waiting for his train when approached by the Big Guy, who yearns to find places in Brooklyn with attractive names, like Bensenhoist and Red Hook. The narrator, quarreling almost to the point of fisticuffs with a bystander over directions for the Big Guy to follow, is astonished over the Big Guy's quests, as he studies a map of the city. And he becomes wholly disgusted as well as doubtful of the Big Guy's sanity when asked by him abruptly if people ever drown in Brooklyn, snapping back, "I don't know whatcha mean. . . . Never hoid of no one drownin' heah in Brooklyn, unless you mean a swimmin' pool. Yuh can't drown in Brooklyn,' I says. Yuh gotta drown somewhere else—in duh ocean, where dere's wateh" (14). When the Big Guy, continuing to study his map, keeps repeating "Drownin'," "Drownin'," our impatient and now slightly unnerved narrator gets off the train before his stop, rather than proceed in company with this "nut" with "dat crazy expression in his eyes." Long after the incident, he still muses over it:

Jesus! I've t'ought about dat guy a t'ousand times since den an' wondered what eveh happened to 'm goin' out to look at Bensenhoist because he liked duh name! Walkin' aroun' t'roo Red Hook by himself at night an' lookin' at his map! How many people did I see get drowned out heah in Brooklyn! How long would it take a guy wit a good map to know all deh was to know about Brooklyn!

Jesus! What a nut he was! I wondeh what eveh happened to 'm, anyway! I wondeh if someone knocked him on duh head, or if he's still wanderin' aroun' in duh subway in duh middle of duh night wit his little map! Duh poor guy! Say, I've got to laugh, at dat, when I t'ink about him! Maybe he's found out by now dat he'll neveh live long enough to know duh whole of Brooklyn. It'd take a guy a lifetime to know Brooklyn t'roo an' t'roo. An' even den, yuh wouldn't know it all (14).

Edward Bloom's excellent critical commentary on this story explores the deeper meaning as opposed to the surface narrative. In contrast to the narrator, who thinks he knows Brooklyn as "t'roo an' t'roo" as anyone possibly could, the Big Guy—the Wolfean protagonist of the novels—is in search of aesthetic fulfillment from the city. Indeed, one *may* drown in Brooklyn from an oversaturation with the mundane and tawdry in life. If, as Bloom posits, the theme of the story is that "the search for order, beauty, and individuality . . . may indeed be fruitless but must never be abandoned" (145), then the narrator doesn't realize the implication of his own words at the end of the story: "It'd take a guy a lifetime to know Brooklyn t'roo an' t'roo. An' even den, yuh wouldn't know it all." No indeed, not the narrator's sort anyway. Maybe not even the artist, but at least he attempts to know it in its most important aspect—the life of the spirit.

The humor of the story resides mainly in the breezy Brooklynese of the narrator—ungrammatical street talk that flows almost unceasingly—in the humorous antics of the pugnacious narrator, and—in a darker vein—in the ironic gulf between what he knows and what the Big Guy knows, the same kind of comic tension that exists in many of the narrative patterns in Old Southwest humor, such as Thomas Bangs Thorpe's "The Big Bear of Arkansas" in which outer narrator and inner storyteller are worlds apart in their levels of sophistication and understanding. Elizabeth Evans in her article "Thomas Wolfe: Some Echoes from Mark Twain" has depicted Wolfe as sharing some of Twain's darker views on the human condition; I see the situation in "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn" as one of those instances.

The story is an excellent piece of work.⁴ McElderry has said it is one of Wolfe's better stories using city street dialect (*Thomas Wolfe* 116), and Boyer, calling

it one of Wolfe's "simplest and most impressive short stories" ("The City" 38), cites it as an example of the author's changing attitude toward city life after his move in 1931 from Manhattan to Brooklyn—a change that caused Wolfe to develop an understanding and sympathy for the people in the big city, as opposed to his earlier intimidation over and then general disliking for the city and its people.

Wolfe's other two *New Yorker* stories were published two years later in 1937.

"Mr. Malone," which appeared on 29 May, was later included, with several changes and embellishments, in *The Web and the Rock* (1939) as part of chapter 35, "Hope Springs Eternal."⁵ In the *New Yorker* piece the setting is a literary party, evidently in New York, and there are three main characters: Joseph Doaks, an aspiring young novelist; Mrs. Alice Jack, his friend and hostess for the party; and Mr. Seamus Malone, a renowned, but cantankerous writer and critic. There is also a couple simply referred to as "the young man with the beautiful wife," who talk with Mr. Malone about going to Paris.

The figure of Mr. Seamus Malone is modeled on the Irish-born American critic and author Ernest Boyd, who was for a while the husband of Wolfe's first agent, Madeleine Boyd. He was known as an irascible iconoclast whose often unpopular views found their way into many books, the most notable being *Literary Blasphemies*.

Wolfe's portrait of Boyd, the "germ" of which appears in his notebooks in 1935 as a description of one Hugh Malone in a piece called "Homage to Denmark" (II 755–56), is at best uncomplimentary. Paschal Reeves put it well when he said that Wolfe depicts Boyd as "an egotistical, Irish, self-appointed literary pontifex whose views are shaped by enormous conceit and swayed by overwhelming prejudice" (*Albatross* 95). Reeves also relates Wolfe's unfavorable portrait with his general distaste for the Irish, which developed during his years spent in Boston, a hatred evident in some of Wolfe's "bitterest satire, denunciations, caustic comments, and incidental slurring remarks" (93).

In the *New Yorker* story, young Joseph Doaks has been invited by Mrs. Alice Jack to her party mainly to meet Seamus Malone, who has been given a copy of Doaks's new book to read. Holding forth in the limelight from his seat at the end of a sofa and surrounded by the party goers, Malone talks with Doaks only a brief moment before launching a long tirade against modern fiction in general, and another against Paris. The tirade, during which every author from T. S. Eliot to Theodore Dreiser is condemned, keeps Doaks in suspense as to what the great man really thinks about his book. Only at the very end of the story, after he has polished off most modern British and American writers and buried Paris, does Malone return to the subject of Doaks's book, venturing,

"But I thought what I read was—was—" just for a moment the pale lips writhed tormented in his beard, and then—oh, tormented web of race and men—he got it out. He smiled at the young Doaks quite winningly and said, "I like your book. Good luck to you" (27).

The humor of the story lies largely in the physical description of Malone and the account of his peculiar mannerisms and cantankerous nature:

He was a man somewhere in his early forties, of rather fragile physical mold, but giving a spurious impression of ruggedness through the possession of an astonishing beard. This beard covered all his face; it was square cut, not long, but luxuriant, and of an inky, blue-black color. Above the beard a pair of pale-blue eyes surveyed the world with a distempered scorn; the total effect was to give Mr. Malone something of the appearance of an embittered Jesus Christ (22).

Malone's ever-moving lips, thick and rubbery, concealed in the "black foliage" of his beard, are "characterized by astonishing flexibility; they writhed and twisted about in the beard like a couple of venomous snakes. . . . Sometimes they parted in a ghostly travesty of a smile, sometimes they writhed clear around his face in a convulsive snarl. But they were never silent for a moment; through them poured a flood tide of envenomed speech" (22). Malone's voice is so overwhelming that it rises above all conversation in the room. Wolfe describes it as "a simple, all-persuading, all-compelling, all-concluding, and all-dominating—well, this *was* a Voice!" (22).

But the humor of the story also comes from dialogue—or more accurately, Mr. Malone's monologues. Commenting on the value of what he has read in Doaks's book—after railing loud and long against the life, career, politics, and religion of T. S. Eliot—Malone, referring to Doaks's volume, opines,

"But compared to Mr. Eliot's portentous bilge, the perfumed piffle of Mr. Thornton Wilder"—he began to rock back and forth with the old red glitter in his eyes—"the elephantine imbecility of Mr. Theodore Dreiser, the moon-struck, incoherent idiocies of the Sherwood Andersons, the Carl Sandburgs, the Ernest Hemingway 'I am Dumb' school, the various forms of quackery purveyed by the various Frosts, O'Neills, and Jeffers, the Cabells, Glasgows, Peterkins, and Cathers, the Bromfields and Fitzgeralds, the Kansas Tolstoys, the Tennessee Chekhovs, the Dakota Dostoevskis, and the Idaho Ibsens"—he choked—"compared to all the seven hundred and ninety-six varieties of piffle, bilge, quack-salvery, and hocus-pocus that are palmed off upon the eager citizens of this Great Republic by the leading purveyors of artistic hogwash, what this young man has written

is not bad." And after struggling stertorously for breath, he at last exploded in a final despairing effort. "It's all swill!" he snarled. "Everything they print is swill!" If you find four words that are not swill, why then"—he gasped, and threw his hands up again—"print it! *Print it!*" (24).

Finally, there is a certain humor and irony in the tension that mounts during Malone's long spiel on writers and Paris. In fact, the reader is sidetracked so that Malone's opinion of Doaks's work is forgotten until the quick reversal at the end, when almost with the anticlimax of a Mark Twain or one of the platform comedians, he mouths the jolting words, "I liked your book. Good luck to you."⁶

The last story of Wolfe's to appear in the *New Yorker*, "'E: A Recollection," published in the 17 July 1937 issue, is set in England and was constructed from the Daisy Purvis materials found more extensively in *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940). In fact, an expanded version of the story appears in Chapter 32 of the novel, "The Universe of Daisy Purvis," a much more detailed account (especially in setting and situation) than in the *New Yorker* version.

The specific setting of "'E: A Recollection" is a small London flat on Ebury Street sometime during the fall and winter months. Joseph Doaks, the young writer of the "Mr. Malone" piece, has taken the flat to write, and has hired the charwoman of the previous tenant, a Mrs. Daisy Purvis, who is in her mid-forties: "a woman inclined to plumpness, of middling height, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and pink-complexioned, with a pleasant, modest frame, and a naturally friendly nature" (22). She is the charwoman of Doaks, tending to his every housekeeping and culinary need, while also admitting callers to the physician, whose office is one floor down in the flat (and who curiously has only female patients). In actuality she "serves" many masters, for her loyalties and sympathies are extended to all who are above her, embracing even the nobility of England and, above all, her loftiest and truest idol, "'E," who while never specifically identified, is obviously Edward, Prince of Wales, and soon to be Edward VIII, who was, we recall, highly popular among his subjects. Wolfe writes that "her loyalty to anyone she served was . . . unquestioning" (22) and around this loyalty revolves much of the humor of the story. From her simpleminded, working-class view of the world, Mrs. Purvis defends the physician downstairs with his female clientele by proclaiming that women are subject to "nervous diseases" because of the "Moddun Tempo"—especially true in the case of American women, she declares. The English nobility have her sympathies, much to Doaks's vocal dismay, when she reads in the papers that some of their many property holdings must be sacrificed because of costs.

"Ah-h," said Mrs. Purvis, nodding with an air of knowing confirmation as she finished reading this dolorous item. "There you 'ave it! Just as 'is Grace says, we're losin' all of our great estates. And wot's the reason? Why, the owners can no longer afford to pay the taxes—ruinous, 'e calls 'em, and 'e's right. If it keeps up, you mark my words, the nobility 'll 'ave no place left to live. A lot of 'em are migratin' already," she said darkly (24).

Towards "'E" her loyalty and admiration reach their zenith. "'E" can do no wrong. When "'E" travels extensively, it is all for a good cause. When "'E" decides to do something, it's almost by Divine Right. Will "'E" marry his new lady friend (presumably Wallis Simpson) Doaks wonders aloud? Mrs. Purvis replies "Ah!" Wat I always say to *that* is 'E will! 'E'll make up 'is mind to it when 'E 'as to, but not before! 'E won't be driven into it, not 'im! But 'E'll do it when 'E knows it is the proppuh time" (25). In her typical manner, she defends Edward against Doaks's observation that he doesn't seem to want to be king very much, or that his brother George might become king, or that the people might not want Edward. The story closes with her resounding defense: "'E"—her voice fairly soared to a cry of powerful connection—" 'E's the one! 'E's always been the one! And when the time comes, sir, 'E—'E will be king!" (26).

Wolfe's humorous portrayal of Daisy Purvis is heightened by her habit of becoming worked up almost to feverish pitch when she is in the process of defending her point of view. She gets flushed of face and loud of voice, and concludes every troublesome incident she recounts with the definitive phase, "'Shockin,' I calls it!"

The humor in "'E" is more that of caricature than that of the other two *New Yorker* stories, though caricature is present in them also, certainly. Irony abounds too. Here is a poor charwoman so preoccupied with the trouble of her superiors that she thinks them worse off than herself. When Doaks taunts her with her unrealistic view of the nobility's loss of lands and supposed personal suffering, her retort (and quick defense) is that her kind are used to suffering, while "*they*, poor things, they're not." To Doaks hers "was one of the most formidable examples of devotion and loyalty he had ever known" (24).

Wolfe's stories for the *New Yorker*, then, all three productions of the middle 1930s—his most effective period of story writing—all contain that pervasive humor that flourishes in Wolfe. The stories show some flashes of humor reminiscent of the Old Southwest variety, such as the narrative situation in "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn." There is humorous diction in dialect, caricature, and comedy of repeated mannerisms. But more substantively, there is situational

and dramatic irony and a sounding of the depths of pathos, as in "E" and "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn." Thus, Wolfe exhibits some traits of the classical humorists, who habitually use the mode to veil human weakness, error, and tragedy.

Succeed in the humorous mode he did. The *New Yorker* wanted more stories from him. In a letter he wrote to agent Elizabeth Nowell in 1938, Wolfe refers to a letter she had sent him from the editors of the *New Yorker*, which requested more stories from him (*Letters of Thomas Wolfe* 750). And Katherine White, one of those editors, mentioned in 1961 that the magazine would have liked to publish more of Wolfe, but couldn't because he "was essentially a novelist, not a short-story man" ("Wolfe Call" 44).

And that comment brings us back to where this discussion began. Mainly a novelist, yes; but also adept at short fiction, especially by the late 1930s when he entered his third phase of story writing. Mainly a serious writer rather than a humorist? Yes, probably. But "mainly" must not be allowed to obscure the fact that Wolfe's humor asserts a strong presence throughout his works, so strong that it caught the eye of the *New Yorker*, which wanted more from him, but settled for three important testaments of his comic genius.⁷

Notes

¹For example, Charles I. Glicksberg writes, "*From Death to Morning* suggests that Wolfe is not at ease in the short story, as subjectivity subordinates plot." See "Thomas Wolfe," *Canadian Forum* 15 (January 1936): 24-25.

²See Boyer's "The City in the Short Fiction of Thomas Wolfe," *The Thomas Wolfe Newsletter* 7 (Fall 1983): 36-40; "The Development of Form in Thomas Wolfe's Short Fiction," in Richard S. Kennedy, ed., *Thomas Wolfe: A Harvard Perspective*, (Athens, OH: Croissant, 1983), 31-42; "Nowell and Wolfe: The Working Relationship," *Thomas Wolfe Review* 5 (Spring 1981): 18-21; "The Short Fiction of Thomas Wolfe," Diss. Pennsylvania State University, 1979.

³See Watkins, "Thomas Wolfe," *Mississippi Quarterly* 20 (Spring 1967): 90-96, and "II. Wolfe" in "Rhetoric in Southern Writing," *Georgia Review* 12 (Spring 1958): 79-82; Hugh Holman, "The Loneliness at the Core," *The New Republic* (10 October 1955): 16-17; Elizabeth Evans, "Thomas Wolfe: Some Echoes From Mark Twain," *Mark Twain Journal* 18 (Summer 1976): 5-6; Louis Rubin, *Thomas Wolfe: The Weather of His Youth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955); John L. Idol, Jr., "Angels and Demons: The Satire of *Look Homeward, Angel*," *Studies in Contemporary Satire* 1 (1975): 39-46, "Thomas Wolfe and Jonathan Swift," *South Carolina*

Review 8 (November 1975): 43-54, and "Thomas Wolfe's Satire: A Study of Objects, Motives, and Artistry." Diss. Arkansas, 1965.

⁴"Only the Dead Know Brooklyn" was selected by Edward J. O'Brien for inclusion in *The Best American Short Stories of 1936* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936), 327-32, and was also collected in the first volume of *Short Stories from The New Yorker* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), 123-28.

⁵In *The Web and the Rock* version, Joseph Doaks is George (Monk) Webber, Alice Jack is, of course, Esther Jack, and Mr. Malone has been aged from his early forties to his early fifties. The background is more fully drawn, and the whole setting is embellished with introductory and concluding paragraphs. Much more emphasis is placed on the effect of Webber's encounter with Seamus Malone on the young writer's life at that low point in his career as would-be novelist.

⁶An interesting aside to the *New Yorker's* publication of the story is found in the words of Katherine S. White, wife of E. B. White and one of the editors of the magazine. She was assigned to handle Wolfe's story, but was alarmed, as was the editorial staff in general, that in the original submission the damning portrait of Malone was so recognizably that of Ernest Boyd that a libel suit would likely ensue. She writes of a telephone call to Wolfe in which she asked him to disguise Boyd's portrait. To her pleasant surprise, she found Wolfe "voluble, charming, gracious, eager to avoid libel, and grateful to the *New Yorker* for the chance" ("Wolfe Call" 44), and he made the changes willingly (among other alterations, restyling the critic's spade-shaped beard). For further references to the preparation and publication of "Malone" in the *New Yorker*, see Kennedy, *Beyond Love*, 55-56, 59.

⁷I wish to thank David Barrow of Durham, North Carolina, and Lad Kirsten of Dallas, Texas, for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

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“The Lost Boy” and the Line of Life

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A brooding young “stranger in a noisy inn” is “pent in his dark soul” in the eighth chapter of *Look Homeward, Angel* (68). This lost boy, of course, is Thomas Wolfe’s Eugene Gant—“not quite six” but already “loose . . . in the limitless meadows of sensation” (66). Around Eugene at home “a vast aerial world of fantasy was erecting its fuming and insubstantial fabric” as his “pieced-out world” expanded under the “power of his imagination.” Clearly the “gates of his life were closing him in” from his family’s knowledge.

At school, where he physically “won his first release from the fences of home,” the “ragged spume and wrack of fantasy and the lost world still floated from time to time through his clear schoolday morning brain” (70). Although he learned to read almost at once, Eugene was especially “walled in his ancient unknowing world” whenever his older companion Max Isaacs and the other students made their letters. This lost boy’s “jagged wavering spear-points” did not amount to writing. Then suddenly one day Max’s “line of life . . . cut the knot in [Eugene] that all instruction failed to do, and instantly he seized the pencil and wrote the words in letters fairer and finer than his friend’s.” Eugene “thought of this event later; always he could feel the opening gates in him, the plunge of the tide, the escape; but it happened like this one day at once.” This miraculous “line of life” is the “beautiful developing structure of language” (71).

Already walled in by his books and dark, fantastic musings, Eugene, with a cry in his throat, will now take sanctuary in this line of life. That which he found will lose him further.

The words “The Lost Boy” appear in the several lists of possible titles set down by Thomas Wolfe for his “O Lost” manuscript about Eugene that would become famous in 1929 as *Look Homeward, Angel* (Kennedy and Reeves I:322–25).

Wolfe's extensive composition actually entitled "The Lost Boy" was not written until January and February of 1937. It is not devoted essentially to Eugene but to the undying impressions Grover Gant's wise, short life had made on several family members up to and after 1904. The line of life of this developing story, fifty years after its initial publication in *Redbook Magazine*, is not yet complete.

The St. Louis house in which Grover Wolfe had died of typhoid in November 1904, during the World's Fair, was sought out and visited by Thomas Wolfe in mid-September 1935. He was en route back to New York from his summer trip to Boulder for the Writer's Conference and a personal exploration of the far West. To get his bearings in St. Louis, Wolfe had written to his mother the previous July while he was on the way to Colorado: "I intend to stop off in St. Louis on way back to see house we lived in—will you please send me the correct address at once, it's most important." In closing this hasty note he reiterates, "And please send me the St. Louis address and any other information about St. L you remember—" (Holman and Ross 254–55).

These requests to Mrs. Wolfe were effective; but the address she sent, the one at which she had operated a boarding house called "The North Carolina," had changed since 1904. Fairmount Avenue had been renamed Cates. So Wolfe sought further assistance at a fire station in the city, finally found the correct corner of Cates and Academy Street, and even took a photograph of the house in which Grover had died. Other results of this urgent 1935 return to St. Louis by Wolfe are apparent in the fourth part of "The Lost Boy." In an interview published 20 September 1935 in the St. Louis *Star-Times*, Wolfe is unwilling to reveal the exact address which he had sought out so diligently because "in a moment of forgetfulness" he had told the woman now living in the house that "his brother had died in that room 'right there'" (Magi and Walser 46–47). More than a year of his own troubled life and career would pass before Wolfe would become absorbed in the meanings of Grover's life and death again.

By March 1937 Thomas Wolfe was financially strapped as well as exhausted from travel, personal frustration, and the rush of creativity in which "The Lost Boy" and several other shorter pieces including "The Child by Tiger" had been written. Yet he worked promptly and cooperatively with Elizabeth Nowell to cut in half the approximately eighty-page typescript of the story about Grover. Edwin Balmer of *Redbook* had indicated that he would pay good money for a 10,000-word story by Wolfe. The good money was the good news.

Nowell's letter of 5 March 1937 to Wolfe suggests the work at hand:

I guess this will help keep you out of mischief all right Saturday afternoon. I've cut hell out of it but finally got it down within 100 words

of the forty pages Balmer said it would have to be. A lot of the places will probably make your heart bleed because I wouldn't have thought of cutting them except in desperation. But anyway, look them over and see where they need smoothing out and maybe rewriting a little, and what you think about the whole business. And if any of them seem too outrageous to you maybe you can find some other way. (Kennedy 54.)

By this stage of the editing, Wolfe had begun to call the original typescript of "The Lost Boy" the "old version." This matter and others can be investigated in folders 1027-1032 of the William B. Wisdom Collection of Thomas Wolfe Papers in the Houghton Library at Harvard. What Wolfe and Nowell were deleting in order to bring the story within Balmer's limits is clear from Nowell's brackets and other markings in all four parts of the story as originally typed. No wonder the agent felt Wolfe's heart would bleed over her desperate cuts in a lot of places. If he actually suffered, he still went along with most of her suggestions. Only once did he add text where she had indicated a cut; she finally prevailed in the matter.

Out of Part I came almost everything on pages 3-16, a slow and thoroughly savory account of Grover's three-o'clock-in-the-afternoon passage through the Square. This marvelous writing gives Grover the full and friendly, if vulnerable, character of a mature, beloved, and observant boy. These deleted passages make it clear that a number of men besides the father would gladly have taken Grover's part in the candy store fudge and stamps dispute that dominates this part of the published story. In the dismayed but still center of his turning world, Grover comes out looking like a thief or a careless trader.

The chief deletion from Part II of the old version of "The Lost Boy" is a racial episode. In it Grover, as portrayed by his mother, is the little man of her traveling family and not a victimized boy to be defended by his father. To remain at home himself, Mr. Gant had hired a "big old yellow, pockmarked darky" named Simpson Featherstone to work for Eliza in St. Louis. Knowing that there are no Jim Crow laws in force in Indiana, Featherstone comes forward in the train and takes a seat with Eliza and the children as they cross the state's border. Grover orders the black man out, and out he goes. This scene, which the mother savors, is based upon the same character whom Wolfe presents in "The Web of Earth" as Dan in Ambrose Radiker's saloon. As Simpson Simms he appears again in *The Web and the Rock*. Also deleted from the second part of the old version of "The Lost Boy" were some of the references to Grover's mental superiority to Eugene and numerous details of Grover's acumen as a trader superior to Eliza herself. Yet the essence of these two aspects of Grover's character remains.

In his mother's eyes Grover is a mental and business wizard, never a defenseless child whom papa must rescue and take up for as in Part I.

The editing of Part III led to the excision of numerous short passages in which sister Helen seems like a snickering or stuttering and confused woman who looks back over decades with strange nostalgia to the slavery of being Eliza's daughter. Enough text remains to show that she had viewed Grover as her parent; and she questions Eugene, who is educated now, about the meaning of life, especially in terms of a family photograph that had been taken before he was born. This part of the story's complicated line of life extends into Mabel Wolfe Wheaton's recollections as they are preserved in *Thomas Wolfe and His Family* (104–10). Wolfe's sister provides material about Grover at home as well as in St. Louis; her views comprise a parallel text to the old as well as the edited versions of the story. She also places the candy store episode of Part I in the perspective of the father's fierce devotion to their family (101–04).

In Part IV the most significant deletion made by Wolfe and Nowell was an elaborate wasteland passage about a kind of desolation that one feels at the end of a hot day in a great city in America. This attitude of the narrator survives in the edited text but is very muted.

The writer and his talented, devoted agent also took the typescript of "The Lost Boy" through two minor revisions in addition to this major cutting and polishing. Wolfe rewrote the curse of the crippled and stingy Mr. Crocker by the stonemason father in Part I and then slightly expanded the interview between the narrator and Mrs. Bell inside the house in St. Louis in Part IV. As Wolfe worked, Nowell's own chief concern was the overall word count. In her hand at the top of one of the later revisions appears a note to Miss H, their typist. Nowell asks if 300 instead of 270 words could be typed on each page so that Balmer at *Redbook* would not be dismayed by the bulk of the surviving story. Their other editing was accomplished without adding any additional words to the text. Simply, the names of the characters were removed from the Gant saga to which Wolfe had understandably returned in writing the story. Grover becomes Robert, and Eliza is renamed Martha. Since Eugene had not been mentioned by name in the old version or its revisions, there is no named replacement for him. But Helen for some reason becomes Sue; and Steve, Daisy, Ben, and Luke are christened Jim, Mary, Dick, and Bill respectively. Even Woodson Street is changed to Orchard.

The alteration of the names of the characters was acceptable to Wolfe and had been a part of Nowell's understanding with *Redbook* all along. In an 18 August 1937 letter to Wolfe, who was writing in Asheville and Oteen, she

tells him that she has *reassured* Balmer that not one of the names in the proof of "The Lost Boy" belongs to a real person (Kennedy 74). Why the editor of the magazine wanted to avoid the legal snares of Wolfe's suspect reputation for autobiographical fiction in 1937 need not be specified. The legal and critical views are well known. But why Thomas Wolfe chose to change Grover to Robert for publication is worthy of comment. This boy is in no obvious way related to the family of Joyners in "The Hills Beyond" in which Judge Robert Joyner has a son. His name is Edward. It is true that this youngster, like Robert in "The Lost Boy" and George Webber in *The Web and the Rock*, is fascinatingly preoccupied with the courthouse bell and three o'clock. They have no blood connections, however. It is more probable that Wolfe chose *Robert* as Grover's new name simply because both *Robert* and *Grover* have a frontal *r* and are two syllables long. In Part IV of "The Lost Boy" the child who says *Gova* for *Grover* in the old version finally says *Wöbbut* for *Robert* in the *Redbook* text. In both versions the tongue-tied boy who cannot master an *r* is nonetheless treated to ice cream on King's Highway. This undeserved reward of food completes the motif of good things to eat that runs throughout all four parts of the story.

In the same August letter in which Nowell informs Wolfe that she has reassured Balmer that all the names were safe, she reveals that two "swell illustrations" will accompany his story in the November *Redbook*. In one the angry father, looking Lincolnesque, would be confronting the candy man; the other would show the mother sending the girl who had eaten pork and beans downtown with Robert out of the house to get the doctor. The agent's actual thoughts, like Wolfe's, may have been that the space to be taken up with these drawings could have been used to publish more of the original story. But she does not say so. She ends, instead, by informing the author: "They left off the Roman numerals at the beginning of the various sections and I said I thought it would be better if they were put back, although if it was dead against their policy, I would cede the matter" (Kennedy 74). The radically cut story was published as *Redbook's* "novelette of the month" without the numerals at the beginning of its four sections.

Wolfe did not have to wait until November 1937 to be paid for "The Lost Boy." On April 8, Nowell had informed him: "Here it is at last, 1500 dollars from *Redbook* minus \$150 for me" (Kennedy 56). It was an unprecedented fee for Wolfe—in fact, the most he would ever be paid for a single story. A few days later he was heading home to Asheville for the first time since the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel*. "The Lost Boy" would pay the way. Once more Wolfe and Eugene and Grover and now Robert were in the same line

of life. In this way this story's complex history is also connected to those short works like "Return" as well as "The Real Thing" (from "The Return of the Prodigal"), which resulted from Wolfe's actual homecomings in the spring and summer of 1937. That which had been lost was found, in a sense, or at least it had returned.

In fact this famous springtime homecoming paid for by the sale of "The Lost Boy," which begins in April itself, involves a much longer line of life than the eight years Wolfe had lived and labored away from Asheville. In revising his first book's typescript in 1928, the unknown writer had committed himself to shortening the "St. Louis scene save for Grover's death" (Skipp, "Editing" 2). Chapter 5 of *Look Homeward, Angel* is Wolfe's first moving account of Grover's death. And in Chapter 8 the 1904 World's Fair is evoked in a catalog of Eugene's sensational existence in the springtime:

He remembered yet the East India Tea House at the Fair, the sandalwood, the turbans, and the robes, the cool interior and the smell of India tea; and he had felt now the nostalgic thrill of dew-wet mornings in Spring, the cherry scene, the cool clarion earth, the wet loaminess of the garden, the pungent breakfast smells and the floating snow of blossoms. (69).

Back in time prior to the composition and editing of *Look Homeward, Angel* goes the line of life of Grover's story, however. Wolfe wrote one of his most important letters, a long one to his mother, in the North where spring was having its effect on him in 1923. With young power he expresses his desire to "know life and understand it and interpret it without fear and favor" (Holman and Ross 42). Then referring to spring in North Carolina, to his never forgetting anything, and to how things slowly take shape "out of the world of infant darkness," Wolfe becomes progressively specific, detailed. He is getting to Grover. For someone like Wolfe who believed that to remember something was to know it for the first time, this is a fervent operation. He writes:

— the small of tea at the East India House — I'll never forget it — Grover's sickness and death — I am awakened at midnight by Mabel and she says, "Grover's on the cooling board." I don't know what a cooling board is but am anxious to see. I don't know what death is but have a vague, terrified sensation that something awful has happened — Then she takes me in her arms and up the hall — Disappointed at the cooling board — its only a table — The brown mole on his neck — The trip home — visitors in the parlor with condolences — Norah Israel was there — Then it gets fairly plain thereafter and I can trace it step by step.

This is why I think I am going to be an artist. The things that really mattered sank in and left their mark. (44)

Our following step by step the line of life of "The Lost Boy" has brought us through actual searches for details, imploring and confessional letters, long periods of brooding, and wonderful rushes of creativity to the bloody labor of editing to make magazine publication of the story possible. Then Wolfe himself was prematurely lost in death. Perhaps only the dead know Robert—or is it Grover?

In 1941 when Edward C. Aswell brought out *The Hills Beyond*, he placed a version of "The Lost Boy" first and the collection's title selection near the end, followed by "A Note on Thomas Wolfe." In commenting in this "Note" on "The Lost Boy," Wolfe's editor says that it had been published in a magazine in 1937. He neither names the magazine nor indicates he has made numerous changes in the text on which Wolfe and Nowell had worked so carefully in early 1937. Yet Aswell does provide several interesting comments about Wolfe's continuing absorption with Grover's death. "Tom used to say that he wrote a book in order to forget" about Grover. That ploy failed. "So he kept thinking about it, and the result was this fine and moving story. One of its interesting points is that it illustrates Tom's desire to extract the whole substance of an experience by getting at it on four levels at once" (295).

Of course Aswell's version of "The Lost Boy" is the one everybody knows today, the one upon which readers, students, and scholars alike have based their judgments. And these estimations have been generally high. Aswell preserves the original story's four parts, each of them is longer than the respective *Redbook* portion, and each part is numbered as Wolfe and Nowell had originally intended in 1937. Moreover, Aswell has identified the point of view in the enumeration of Parts II, III, and IV. He has also changed Part IV from a first-person to a third-person narrative, and in Parts II and III Aswell identifies Eugene as the person to whom the Mother and the Sister speak. Only Part I is free of the editor's technical changes, but this portion of the story as well as all of the others is expanded by his mixing in of passages and phrases which Wolfe and Nowell had cut in 1937. Grover's and the other names are returned to the familiar Gant saga. Only our slowly reading the 1937 and 1941 versions of "The Lost Boy" side by side will reveal the magnitude of the substantive and technical changes made silently by Aswell. To find the source of the additional material that appears in the 1941 version, it is necessary to spend our time patiently with the old version of the story close at hand.

Work done so carefully is not the job book reviewers are paid to do. The men and women who reviewed *The Hills Beyond* in 1941, for example, do not explore the fact that "The Lost Boy" had had an earlier life in *Redbook*. And not every one of these reviewers is drawn to Aswell's version of the story. In the *New Republic*, Malcolm Cowley on 3 November is taken instead with "God's Lonely Man" and writes about "Wolfe and the Lost People" in terms of the Lost Generation. Clifton Fadiman praises "Chickamauga" for the *New Yorker*, and Howard Mumford Jones in *Saturday Review* much prefers this Civil War story and "The Lost Boy" to every other piece in *The Hills Beyond*. Two other reviewers of this posthumous work speak of "The Lost Boy" in ways that anticipate its rise to considerable fame in the last forty years.

In *New York Times Book Review*, J. Donald Adams finds it one of the finest of Wolfe's shorter pieces in a 26 October essay. He is especially attracted to the vital portraits of the father and mother, in addition to the family's tender and searing memory of the deceased older brother. In *Commonweal* for 14 November, Sister Mariella (O.S.B.), who deplored Wolfe's lean, stripped style, writes in this approving way of "The Lost Boy:"

Wolfe achieves precisely the miracle that he does in all his finest work. In no other writer of modern times is there quite his ability to reconcile Coleridgean opposites. The heart's sad unwillingness to accept life's mutability is juxtaposed to so passionate a memory for the shape and color of things that time and change seem suddenly halted in the grip of great pity and great love. Art here achieves a synthesis more calming and at the same time more disturbing than life itself.

Numerous other perceptive minds have thought in this way about Aswell's version of Wolfe's story. The fact that it is not the published version that is most authoritative has been lost sight of even by Wolfe scholars. Their studies of the story have been based entirely on the 1941 and not the 1937 text. This preference is not due merely to ease of access. Both Aswell's returning of the story to the Gant saga and the restoration of some moving lyrical passages from the old version suggest why Aswell's version of "The Lost Boy" was destined for an appeal greater than the *Redbook* version, which even Elizabeth Nowell, it seems, viewed as glib (Kennedy 72). At any rate, Elmer D. Johnson's reminder in *Of Time and Thomas Wolfe*, published in 1959, that Wolfe's 1937 story had appeared "much revised" in *The Hills Beyond* did apparently nothing to block the continuing ascendancy of Aswell's version of "The Lost Boy" (55). In recent decades more and more of the young readers who know the Gant saga at all know it from this story, not from *Look Homeward, Angel* or *Of Time and the*

River. Among college survey texts, those by Heath, Norton, and Harper & Row have assisted in this apotheosis of "The Lost Boy"—this successful depiction of Thomas Wolfe in Edward Aswell's terms.

But now something new and different is happening, two things in fact, as we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the *Redbook* version's appearance in 1937. Francis Skipp has chosen to print that version of Wolfe's story in *The Complete Short Stories of Thomas Wolfe* (359–80). Skipp's detailed discussion of the story in defending the authority of the 1937 text is convincing (xxii–xxiv). Thus two conflicting versions of one of the best things Wolfe ever wrote are confronting scholars and readers alike. What is to be done? The prudent answer, it seems to me, is to recall what David Herbert Donald stresses in *Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe*. Namely: "Wolfe's most natural and effective literary form was the short novel" (396); confirming Hugh Holman (vii–xx), Professor Donald asserts that Wolfe "displayed a splendid sense of artistry in the short novel of 15,000 to 40,000 words" (483). The old version of "The Lost Boy" should now be published. We have the 1937 and 1941 versions of the story in current circulation. Finally, however, we do not want only Aswell's or Elizabeth Nowell and Edward Balmer's version. We want Wolfe's version. And his version of "The Lost Boy" is the old version, an unpublished short novel of approximately 23,000 words. If this version were to be published, it would become both for the mature and adolescent reader, a representative line of life to Wolfe's foremost book, *Look Homeward, Angel*, both in substance and style as well as in narrative technique.

James Dickey observes in Francis Skipp's new edition of Wolfe's short stories that the "stark and terrible account of a lynching" we know as "The Child by Tiger" is likely "the best selection" in the book (xiv). He then notes that paradoxically this very good selection is not the best Wolfe. Put another way, this spare story of racial violence leads the reader to *The Web and the Rock*. Dickey, on the other hand, does not say that the 1937 version of "The Lost Boy" is representative of Wolfe's best writing. He does not even mention the story. The best version of it, the old version, has yet to take its place in Wolfe's best line of life, his beautiful developing structure of language.

Throughout his life Thomas Wolfe contemplated himself and his brother Grover in many of the same terms and possibilities. Lost, could the child, the boy, the man be found in any significant way that would improve upon simply being lost? The one being sought may be lost in a world of his own creation or in another world—a world made by death at an early age in particular. While the vital connection between Eugene's development as a writer and Wolfe's own triumph of exuberance and lyrical mastery has been followed and many times

retraced, the line of life which Grover and Wolfe move through together needs more consideration. It is already clear that Thomas Wolfe went back to Grover, and usually to springtime and St. Louis, imaginatively or actually, as he embarked on the great work of his own short life. And sometimes when he actually came home to Asheville, to North Carolina, it was in the spring, as in 1937; and as fittingly as could be, "The Lost Boy" paid the way. Our own way to Wolfe will be underwritten for the decades ahead if we draw the line of this powerful story's life all the way back to its old version, to the short novel in which Wolfe embraced his Gants once more and found again the style for which we love and treasure him and all of them so grandly.

Bringing this original version of "The Lost Boy" into print, circulation, and consideration, we may find that young readers especially are finding Wolfe through his search for himself, his brother Grover, and his craft.

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The Gants in a Bottle

Elaine P. Jenkins

“‘Jeemy,’ said Mrs. Duncan at this moment to her husband, ‘ye’d better go over. He’s loose again, an’ she’s wi’ chile’ ” (Wolfe 23; pt. 1, ch. 3). Thus begins Thomas Wolfe’s dramatic description of the first of many binges by the patriarch in *Look Homeward, Angel*. Gant is indeed “loose again” and his family members—his wife “wi’ chile”—are feeling the impact of his drunken condition.

When James, the Scottish neighbor, along with Jannadeau, the patient neighbor, and Ben, the quiet son, rush to the Gant home, they hear furniture crashing and a woman crying out. A pregnant Eliza opens the door to the three men: “‘Come quick!’ she whispered. ‘Come quick!’ ” At this moment, the intoxicated W. O. Gant makes his appearance—one that will recur with only slight variation with depressing regularity throughout the course of that lengthy narrative we have all come to love and admire.

“By God, I’ll kill her,” Gant screamed, plunging down the stairs at greater peril to his own life than to any other. “I’ll kill her now, and put an end to my misery.”

He had a heavy poker in his hand. The two men seized him; the burly jeweller took the poker from his hand with quiet strength.

“He cut his head on the bed-rail, mama,” said Steve descending. It was true: Gant bled.

While Steve runs for Uncle Will, the Scotchman restrains W. O. as Eliza screams repeatedly, “‘Keep him away from me! Keep him away!’ ” Grover and a country nurse then lead Eliza back to her room out of harm’s way—for the moment (Wolfe 23–24; pt. 1, ch. 3).

So ends a poignant scene in *Look Homeward, Angel*—but it is a masterful one as it prepares us for the delineation of what modern psychology calls the typical alcoholic family. Wolfe’s Gant family, given to the world in 1929, mirrors with remarkable and near-clinical precision our present knowledge about

the dynamics of a family debilitated by the power of alcoholism. From W. O. to Eugene, from Eliza to Helen, the characters' immediate actions and their life-styles are nearly predictable once we see them in the roles of parents and children in an alcoholic family.

Alcoholism, we all know, is a disease that affects the whole family. Because the alcoholic in the family has a different chemical makeup from the ordinary person, he metabolizes the drug in a unique way. The alcoholic's disease is progressive, terminal, and incurable, even though it can be arrested by abstinence and with a self-help program like Alcoholics Anonymous for the alcoholic and Al-Anon for the family. We now know that simple abstinence does not cure the alcoholic or the family, and in affected families, thoughts and actions become distorted as family life revolves around the alcoholic's drinking instead of centering on each person's own growth. Further, it is now clear that alcoholism may be inherited and that children of alcoholics tend to marry alcoholics or to have addictive relationships, if, in fact, they do not become alcoholics themselves (Woititz 103). The typical alcoholic family includes the alcoholic and a spouse who is usually an *enabler*, a person who helps the alcoholic to continue drinking by taking care of the bills, lying to cover up the drinking, bailing the alcoholic out of jail or awkward situations, or carrying him home from bars (Wegscheider 89).

According to Sharon Wegscheider in *Another Chance: Hope & Health for the Alcoholic Family*, the alcoholic family resembles a mobile that is out of balance. Because the alcoholic is addicted to the bottle, other members must adjust to the family unit. Usually, the children assume one of four basic roles: the *hero*, the *scapegoat*, the *lost child*, or the *mascot*. In short, the family ends up role-playing. The destructiveness of the roles, Wegscheider states, lies not in the nature of the roles, but in the fact that the role-playing leads to dishonesty and a lack of normal human development. Moreover, in an alcoholic family, these roles, which can occur in all troubled families, are "more rigidly fixed and are played with greater intensity, compulsion, and delusion" than in other troubled families. Thus, the alcohol abuse produces a rippling effect on the entire family (85).

A few scholars have touched on the alcoholic nature of the Gant family. Margaret Wallace mentions W. O.'s drunkenness in "A Novel of Provincial American Life," and Richard Walser in his article "Thomas Wolfe: An Introduction and Interpretation" notes that "the night Eugene was born, Gant had been on a glorious drunk. As the child grew up, he along with his brothers and sisters were caught hopelessly in the cross-currents" (67). Also, William Snyder in *Thomas Wolfe: Ulysses and Narcissus* indicates that much of Thomas Wolfe's life style was patterned after his father's, including "the tendency toward alcoholism" (15). But the impact

VISIBLE QUALITIES			INNER FEELINGS		REPRESENTS TO FAMILY		CHARACTERISTICS		POSSIBLE FUTURE CHARACTERISTICS	
<i>Family Hero</i>			Visible success Does what is right		Inadequate		Self-worth (Family can be proud)		High achiever Grades Friends Sports	
									WITHOUT HELP	
									Workaholic Never wrong Responsible for everything Marry dependent	
									WITH HELP	
									Accepts failure Responsible for self, not all Good executive	
<i>Scapegoat</i>			Hostility Defiance Anger		Hurt		Takes focus off the alcoholic		Negative attention Won't compete with <i>family hero</i>	
									Unplanned pregnancy Troublemaker in school and later in office Prison	
									Accepts responsibility Good counselor Courage Ability to see reality	
<i>Lost Child</i>			Withdrawn Loner		Loneliness Unimportant		Relief (one child not to worry about)		"Invisible" Quiet No friends Follower Has trouble making decisions	
									Little zest for life Sexual identity problems Promiscuous or stays alone Often dies at early age	
									Independent Talented Creative Imaginative	
<i>Mascot</i>			Fragile Immature Needs protection		Fear		Fun and humor (comic relief)		Hyperactive Learning disabilities Short attention span	
									Ulcers (can't handle stress) Compulsive clown Marry <i>hero</i> for care	
									Takes care of self No longer clown Fun to be with Good sense of humor	

[Developed from Sharon Wegscheider, *The Family Trap* (Crystal, Minnesota: Nurturing Networks, n.d.) and *Another Chance* (Palo Alto, California: Science and Behavior, 1981).]

alcoholism had on the development of the Gant family has been left virtually untouched by scholars.

The Gant family exemplifies the alcoholic family (See chart titled "Children of Chemically Dependent Families.") In looking at Gant's early drinking years, the reader sees that a hard drinking pattern had been established even then. Wolfe writes of the "riotous years in Baltimore," of Gant's "work and savage drunkenness." After a period of sobriety and constant employment, Gant marries Cynthia, his first wife, but within eighteen months he is a "howling maniac again." Staying sober is apparently a struggle for Gant. When Cynthia dies, Wolfe writes that it is all gone for Gant—his wife, his shop, his "hard-bought praise of soberness," and then as if to seal Gant's role as an alcoholic, the "tremendous bouts of drinking wrecked his health" (4-5; pt. 1, ch. 1).

Gant marries Eliza, his second wife, in Altamont and the standard alcoholic pattern re-emerges. He becomes violent, verbally abusive, a womanizer, and often has to be carried home in a drunken stupor. Sometimes he binges for weeks, sometimes daily, the pattern changing only in length. Other characters see only the tip of the horror, fear, and pain the family withstands: "What Eliza endured in pain and fear and glory no one knew. He breathed over them all his hot lion-breath of desire and fury. . . ." (Wolfe 15, pt. 1, ch. 2). Apparently, Gant physically abuses Eliza, who resorts to locking herself in her room when he is on a rampage.

Typical of many alcoholics, W. O. has a low frustration tolerance. Daily, he works himself into a tirade against Eliza. And, though he seems quite independent, he actually depends on Eliza to bear the brunt of his anger. Because of her marital ties to Gant, she is the safest and most convenient outlet for his anger. W. O. is like most alcoholics who hate themselves for what they are doing, knowing they are destroying themselves and their loved ones, yet still striking out at the closest, often the dearest, people to relieve their pent-up self-loathing. An extrovert, Gant exhibits grandiosity. He builds large fires using an overabundance of wood; his meals are plentiful banquets. His outgoing, social nature is known about town. He shows two faces—one pleasant, loveable to outsiders and one ugly, angry to his family.

Eliza does move out from the family circle on two separate occasions, and permanently when she moves to Dixieland. Normally, when an alcoholic is forced to be alone, he will find another spouse to be an *enabler*. But Eliza continues to feed W. O. and to allow other forms of family contact. Their daughter, Helen, now provides the mothering the alcoholic needs in Eliza's absence, so Eliza's moving out only makes Gant's drinking easier without the stress of the husband-

wife relationship. Most alcoholics cannot deal with intimate relationships because their emotional pain prevents them from handling any other feelings. So they shut off communication of feelings and any other attempts at closeness (Wegscheider 83).

Before moving out for good, Eliza tries the expected responses of a spouse, or "co-alcoholic," as spouses are sometimes called. W. O. is actively drinking, and fighting is constant between husband and wife. "From the first . . . an obscure and final warfare was being waged between them. Eliza wept or was silent to his curse, nagged briefly in retort to his rhetoric, gave like a punched pillow to his lunging drive—and slowly, implacably had her way" (Wolfe 16; pt. 1, ch. 2). Wolfe writes the exact words commonly used to describe a spouse's reaction to an alcoholic mate—she wept, was silent, nagged, gave, had her way (manipulated). People surrounding an alcoholic live life reacting, not acting. Twice over the eleven years while the children are being born, Eliza even tries to send him off to treatment, but it only keeps him sober for six weeks without other benefit. As soon as he returns to Altamont, he drinks again in spite of the fact that Eliza threatens every bar owner who serves him a drink.

Eliza's planning and slow, deliberate actions are ways of coping with an alcoholic if the *enabler* is to survive. Some of her actions are part of her peculiar personality, but spouses of alcoholics learn to expect anything, to stay calm, and to be prepared. As the disease progresses, both the alcoholic and co-alcoholic become even more manipulative. Since the alcoholic is usually impulsive, the only planning is done by the co-alcoholic. Reacting emotionally only stirs up fearful, emotional situations further. Family members begin exhibiting the qualities of domination and self-absorption. True to her role, Eliza begins to run their land acquisitions and becomes self-absorbed in acquiring more and more property. She decides what to do regardless of Gant's wishes. She becomes what most spouses and children of alcoholics have to be—a survivor.

Whether Eliza was ever a loving, passionate, warm personality is questionable. She does show glimpses of compassion and caring, but she rarely expresses her emotions. Several factors may have caused her reservations. Living in an alcoholic situation is depressing, and a depressed person becomes "bankrupt" in emotions; the constant stress drains the person and makes him or her feel numb. An *enabler* can become so depressed that she does not care about her appearance or about food. Eliza, for example, becomes slovenly in dress, wearing men's old clothes, eats little, and seems to care little about feeding her family. In these ways, she is classically depressed. It would be less painful for the person if she could just lose touch with her feelings. Certainly, some of Eliza's actions can be attributed

to stinginess and a need to possess material things, but some of Eliza's aloofness must stem from the emotional emptiness of living with an alcoholic.

Unfortunately for the spouse and other family members, the alcoholic cannot give anything emotionally; his focus is the bottle. We note throughout the novel that Gant never expresses deep pain or suffering over the loss of anyone. When Grover dies from typhoid, his only comment is "The best boy I had, . . . By God, he was the best of the lot" (Wolfe 48; pt. 1, ch. 5). When Ben dies Gant is busy feeling sorry for himself, wondering why this happened to him.

"To think this must come upon me," Gant sniffled, responding mechanically to her [Eliza's] grief, as he rocked back and forth on his cane and stared into the fire. "O boo-hoo-hoo! What have I done that God should—" "You shut up!" she cried, turning upon him in a blaze of fury (Wolfe 450; pt. 3, ch. 35).

Eliza knows not to seek comfort from a self-centered alcoholic, but instead lashes out in a pitiable attempt to express her own emotions.

On his death bed, Ben, Grover's twin, rejects Eliza as she has always rejected him, but his death rocks them all. "The sad prophetic story, a brief and terrible summary of the waste, the tardiness, and the ruin of their lives, silenced them for a moment with its inexorable sense of tragedy. They had nothing to say" (Wolfe 449; pt. 3, ch. 35). It is not surprising that they say nothing; people in an alcoholic home rarely communicate. Silence is learned early in life. Expressing one's feelings makes a person vulnerable, and in an alcoholic home, the survival tactic is to say nothing.

Not only are the alcoholic family's emotional resources bankrupt, but finances are usually in a state of chaos as well. Either there is real overspending or fear of financial insecurity. Though Eliza comes from a family that values land, it is not surprising that she hoards money. Life with an alcoholic is insecure; much money is squandered on liquor and on bad deals, or else the money is just plain lost during drunks.

With a couple in warfare as Gant and Eliza are, affection, much less love, is nonexistent. Eugene notes of the couple that no one ever saw them "touch each other with affection, without the same inchoate and choking humiliation: they [the children] were so used to the curse, the clamor, and the roughness, that any vacation into tenderness came as a cruel affectation" (Wolfe 53; pt. 1, ch. 6). The children grow up in an abnormal family situation and have to guess what normal family behavior is. At early stages all the boys are sent out to work. Though it was apparently expected that children would work, neither

Gant nor Eliza cares what the boys do as long as they earn money. They don't love and nurture the children; they are just the cause of their existence.

Of the six children characterized fully in the novel, Steve, the firstborn, is the example of a *scapegoat* child. Nearly worthless, he drinks and womanizes just as his father does. As a young person, he becomes responsible for dragging his father home after drunks. He grows up to fit Gant's pattern. Wolfe writes that Eugene watched as Steve's life "hardened rapidly in a defiant viciousness, the antagonism between the boy and Gant grew open and bitter" (37; pt. 1, ch. 5). They could see the worst of each in each other. Nevertheless, Steve serves a purpose in the family setup by taking the focus off Gant's drinking. He is hurt and is "inwardly sore at the abuse Gant heaped on him" (Wolfe 37; pt. 1, ch. 5). As a typical *scapegoat* child, Steve goes to jail once or twice, ends up marrying a woman twelve years older than himself who can financially support him, and continues to get into trouble (Wegscheider, *Family Trap* 13).

The second child, Daisy, becomes a *lost child*. She is withdrawn, quiet, the good girl who causes no problems. Industrious and somewhat studious, she has "little fire, or denial in her" (Wolfe 36; pt. 1, ch. 5). When Gant goes on a drinking spree and comes home yelling and cursing, Daisy runs to the neighbors, frightened, and weeps in shame and fear. She marries and moves away from the family as soon as possible (Wegscheider, *Family Trap* 15).

Helen, the other daughter, does not take on just one role of a child of an alcoholic. In some respects, she could be the *family hero*, but she more nearly becomes an *enabler*, like her mother. Tremendous friction exists between Eliza and her daughter, Helen, with an unnatural "jockeying" for the role of spouse between the two women. The bond between Gant and Helen is very strong; only Helen, for instance, can subdue Gant when he is drunk. At ten years of age, Helen feels responsible for everything, feeding him soup, slapping him to calm him down, caring for him while Eliza must hide in her bedroom to protect herself. Gene says that Helen takes "insatiable delight in him [Gant]" (Wolfe 117; pt. 1, ch. 12). At times, though, Helen hates him, but since she ends up an alcoholic, it is not surprising that there is a special bond between them. They understand how each other thinks. Helen takes care of Gant, feeds him, makes things all right for him. After she marries Hugh Barton, she finally recognizes that she has spent her life caring for Gant, being a fixer, a savior for a drunkard. She claims she will let others care for her now, but of course she doesn't. She continues to allow herself to be drawn back into Gant's life; she and Hugh even move in with Gant for a while. Unable to break the pattern of fixing others instead of caring for her own needs, her role-playing becomes so engrained that she continues it into marriage and adulthood.

As do most of the boys, Helen also has a dependence on alcohol. "She had begun to depend on small potations of alcohol for the stimulus it gave her fevered body—a small drink was enough to operate electrically in her blood; it renewed her, energized her, gave her a temporary and hectic vitality" (Wolfe 118; pt. 1, ch. 12). In the early dependent stages, alcoholics claim drinking gives them a lift; they are anxious and crave the drug that will calm and anaesthetize. Later, the alcoholic needs the drink to make him feel normal. For instance, Helen fools herself by drinking small amounts, though steadily, and using medicines and preparations with alcohol in them, but her drinking pattern still falls in the alcoholic realm.

Little is known of Ben's twin, Grover, except that he was gentle and loving with Eugene when Eugene was a baby. He is "the gentlest and saddest of the boys" and dies from typhoid fever at age twelve (Wolfe 45; pt. 1, ch. 5). And interestingly, both Grover and Ben are quiet, apparently very sensitive boys. Both die young, perhaps a suggestion that sensitive spirits cannot exist in a dysfunctional, cruel family. As a young boy, Grover is described as sad, and Ben is never happy—he has a "curious old man's look" with a "perpetual scowl," "full of pride and tenderness" but "sullen, silent, alone" (Wolfe 48; pt. 1, ch. 5). Ben is another *lost child* in the family. Wegscheider mentions that the *lost child* will most likely turn up randomly in the age progression of the family, and, thus, the propensity to become a *lost child* is affected more by the temperament of the individual (87–88). Ben withdraws emotionally and financially from the family at an early age. After the eighth grade, he supports himself by working all the time and constantly feels the lack of love and support from his parents. In his little spare time, he stays around home, probably trying to connect with a security, a foundation that his sensitive spirit desires, even in the alcoholic home. Gene describes Ben as "a stranger . . . always looking for entrance to light and fellowship" (Wolfe 93; pt. 1, ch. 10). The neglect of all the children bothers Ben, but the neglect of Eugene angers him. Ben grows more quiet and morose as he ages. His conversations with his mother become bitterly scornful, and he has no real communication with his father. He yells at Eliza, "What's there to be grateful for? What have you ever given me? You let me go to hell from the time I was twelve years old. No one has ever given me a damned nickel since then" (Wolfe 444; pt. 3, ch. 34). His inability to achieve recognition reflects the failure of the dysfunctional alcoholic family. "He [Ben] bore encysted in him the evidence of their tragic fault: he walked alone in the darkness, death and the dark angels hovered, and no one saw him" (Wolfe 93; pt. 1, ch. 10). As the child of an alcoholic, Ben needs, more than most children, acceptance

and love to grow. In his alcoholic home, these needs are not met, and he slowly dies, becoming bitter, disillusioned, realizing he needed to get out but didn't. "I've had nothing out of life. I've been a failure. I've stayed here until I'm done for. . . . I wish it was over" (Wolfe 444; pt. 3, ch. 34). He has groped through life. "As he faltered along . . . there was something poignantly moving in his effort: it was the effort of his strange and lonely spirit to find some entrance into life—to find success, position, companionship" (Wolfe 372; pt. 3, ch. 30).

The next son, Luke, the family clown, the *mascot*, is known for his salesmanship, his wit, and generosity. Called "Big-Hearted Unselfish Luke," he is always joking and clowning (Wolfe 95; pt. 1, ch. 10). Outwardly, he works hard at looking as though he is studying and achieving, but inside, he is always afraid people aren't going to like him. He brings gifts and "plays up" to people to cover his fear. Humor carries him along and he brings comic relief to a very stressed family (Wegscheider, *Family Trap* 17). And, there are indications he drinks heavily, too. He brings Gant a supply of whiskey when he visits the home. "Always he brought Gant a suitcase stocked with beer and whiskey. The boy was 'good to his father'" (Wolfe 217; pt. 2, ch. 18).

The baby of the family, Eugene, like Helen, plays two roles in the family. As a young child and up until his teenage years, he is another *lost child* just as Ben and Daisy are. Being withdrawn, a loner, he always feels different. Gene says, "I have lived here with you for seventeen years and I'm a stranger" (Wolfe 420; pt. 3, ch. 32). He also exhibits the desire to perform early in life by going to the Leonards's private school. He wants to bring honor to himself and the family. He then becomes the *family hero*, too. Gene lacks nurturing from Eliza just as all the children do. He tries to find himself in college, in work, in love. He wants "two things all men want: he wanted to be loved, and he wanted to be famous" (Wolfe 89; pt. 1, ch. 9). Feeling inadequate most of the time, Gene describes his awkward appearance and depicts his failure with women (Wegscheider, *Family Trap* 11).

When Gene gets drunk, though, he too feels better. Liquor washes away the ugliness of life. He gets a high that constant abusers do in the beginning of their relationship with the abused substance, a feeling of power and tranquility. Of Gene's first drunk, Wolfe writes, "It was greater than all the music he had ever heard. . . . Why, when it was possible to buy a god in a bottle . . . were men not forever drunken?" (411; pt. 3, ch. 32). The potential for a problem is evident, even if we do not see it develop in Eugene.

With the knowledge of the heartache and pain the drinking causes, all of the Gant children except Grover and possibly Daisy try alcohol, and most of

them end up having a problem with it. Eugene does not show adverse effects at this time from the alcohol, but he has had only the one opportunity of heavy drinking and just discovers its medicinal value. The family's reaction to Gene's drunk is revealing since they all admit the severity of the problem in the family. Helen's response to Gene's drinking is that it only proves that they all like it, stating, "It's in our blood." Eliza calls it "that awful curse!" adding that she "had hoped that I might have one son who might escape it" (Wolfe 415; pt. 3, ch. 32). Ben tells Gene, "You're the last chance—if booze gets you the way it has the rest of us, you're done for" (Wolfe 419; pt. 3, ch. 32). Even Gant himself takes Gene on a walk and gives him a father's short lecture on the evils of alcohol. The talk is delivered because Helen and Eliza tell Gant to admonish Gene, but "he [Gant] had a feeling of personal guilt; he felt like a magistrate fining for intoxication a culprit with whom he has been on a spree the night before. Besides—what if the Bacchic strain in him had been passed on to his son?" (Wolfe 416; pt. 3, ch. 32).

Thus, all of the Gant children are affected by W. O.'s alcoholism, and the dynamics of the alcoholic family clearly apply to the Gant family. Since neither Gant nor the family seeks help for the disease, the family continues on a destructive path that leaves them dysfunctional, pathetic, and emotionally dead. The family can take no other course but that of splintering and staying ill because they never deal with the real problem dominating them, alcoholism. Only Ben and Eugene perceive any serious relational problems. Ben is unable to change, and the novel does not deal with Gene's responses beyond the fact that he leaves the family. Gene says he has been trying to escape since learning to crawl. He states he'll find a way out—alone. "Alone?" said Eliza with the old suspicion. "Where are you going?" To which Gene replies, "Ah, . . . you were not looking, were you? I've gone" (Wolfe 422; pt. 3, ch. 32).

Ironically, Thomas Wolfe's strengths—his independence, talent, and imagination—result from his growing up in an alcoholic home. Our author—the one we have gathered to honor—is clearly a *lost child* who manages to develop his creativity. Out of the pain of his alcoholic home, Thomas Wolfe emerges as a literary genius.

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Thomas Wolfe: *The Aggrieved and Greedy Lover*

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My decision to talk about this aspect of Thomas Wolfe's behavior is linked to a larger story, the way men have traditionally dealt with the women in their lives. As some of you know, I have a professional (as well as personal) interest in the ways the sexes interact. So, let me say quickly that while Thomas Wolfe clearly fits the title of this talk, so do a great many other men. If you have any doubt about that statement (considering it a New York woman's irritating bit of feminist propaganda), I refer you to the recent flurry of stories about Gary Hart, who generously behaved outrageously enough for me to have a wonderfully contemporary frame of reference for my comments.

William Snyder spoke about the issue of dependency as it applies to narcissism, and so I'm not going to repeat that particular theme, but narcissism is certainly the umbrella for much of Mr. Hart's and Thomas Wolfe's attitudes and behavior towards women.

A recent analysis in the *New York Times* on the issue of unhealthy narcissism, as it seemed to relate to Gary Hart, stated that the risks of this condition are a grandiose sense of life's rules not applying to you. In a culture that makes the male sex the more powerful, where men are afraid to lose power, where men are encouraged to strive for external success rather than personal fulfillment, to compartmentalize their lives rather than strive for integration, so that success is compatible with intimacy and love rather than in many ways threatened by it, this kind of reckless, self-absorbed grandiosity can easily take hold. In Gary Hart's case, it was fed by the power of his political role. In Thomas Wolfe's case, it had to do with his ferocious need to be a successful writer.

Thomas Wolfe believed that any behavior of his, no matter how outrageous, should be acceptable to Aline Bernstein. When Aline complained about this astonishing presumption to her psychiatrist, Dr. Beatrice Hinkle explained that Tom undoubtedly felt, as many artists appear to do, that his writing was what "he offered to the world as his contribution in place of himself as an ordinary, adapted being." She further explained that such absorption of the self in creative activity can, in terms of conventional maturity, produce a man who remains in many ways "a child forever."

Furthermore, said the doctor, when an artist falls in love, he may love the woman primarily "for her stimulation or value to him as a creator. However, another person also brings in the problem of reality, and reality has claims of its own and cannot be completely submissive to the will of another. Therefore, the artist cannot maintain for long the reality relation he has assumed, for what he actually wants and needs is a mother who will sacrifice all willingly for him, give much, and demand little in return. He desires to be the spoilt and favorite child, for his own interest is occupied primarily, and often exclusively, with his creative activity." All of us who know the story of Thomas Wolfe and Aline Bernstein must recognize how chillingly prophetic that analysis turned out to be.

I almost called this talk the sense of "needy entitlement," because that term seems to describe the syndrome, easily observed in Tom, of being so incredibly needy for reassurance of love. He complains sadly to his mother, "You never write. You never think of me. If I should die here you'd forget me in two months. You will say you wouldn't, but you would. You don't know me Mama. I'm not important to you." And yet, we see the flip side of his feeling entitled to whatever money he asks, even demands, that Julia send him. With Aline, he had no real compunctions about taking anything she offered, and he escalated his requests so that she would offer or capitulate to his needs more and more. For the needy man with a sense of childish entitlement, there's no demand that is too great to make.

Much of this male orientation is rooted in childhood. Both Gary Hart and Thomas Wolfe had mothers who in many ways were emotionally withholding. In my book on mothers and sons I identified how such a relationship can produce sons who feel cheated, as I say, aggrieved, at not getting their emotional due. In the time of their greatest need, as small children, they could not count on the security of their mother's unequivocal love. Our society tells children it is their right to have such love, and men of such emotionally arid backgrounds often go through life in a sense making up to themselves for what they were deprived of. At the same time, they feel little responsibility to satisfy the needs

of the women who love them. A mother is supposed to love her son just for existing, and the society reinforces the notion that a male does not have real responsibilities to the women who care for them. Gary Hart clearly did not take into account his wife's potential humiliation, nor indeed, that of the young woman he was supposed to be having an affair with, when he gave vent to his impulses. Thomas Wolfe did not feel restrained by how his behavior, no matter how extreme, was making Aline feel.

The paradox is that the man who makes these incredible demands on women, who seems desperately to need to prove he is so superior that he is immune to normal limits and penalties, often unconsciously is actually unsure of his adequacy, whether as a writer or a lover or a powerful man. These men may appear enormously arrogant and confident, but in fact, they are terrified of their own vulnerabilities because society has taught them that admission of these feelings, and indeed the feelings themselves, makes them less of a man. Consequently, because they secretly feel inadequate, success becomes empty and even threatening, for in their heart of hearts they can't believe it's real, or accept their right to have achieved it. I think Thomas Wolfe's anxieties over his writing and his compulsive need to break from relationships that emotionally sustained him both have at least a substantial connection to that hidden desire to fail and punish oneself for his perceived flaws. Freud first isolated this in his patients many years ago.

This may seem overly psychoanalytic, but it's very clear that he kept pushing the boundaries of Aline's devotion to him even when he needed it most, testing its resiliency and risking its demise, by such dreadful behavior as calling her house in the middle of the night so that her husband had to know what was going on, or writing vile insults that wounded her intensely.

Unfortunately, what happens in relationships with men like these is that a woman often finds her own defenses crumbling. Her frustration mounts as she realizes that nothing she can do is enough, will ever be enough to satisfy this greedy, needy man. And worse, that in the struggle to satisfy him, and capitulating to his demands, the person she believed she was herself becomes eroded. Again, one often sees this in the women who stand faceless or despairing in the shadows of ambitious, self-absorbed men. As Aline struggled to keep the relationship with Tom going, she found herself acting in ways that she would never have dreamed possible. "The dignified, balanced, intelligent woman I fancied myself to be disappeared," she wrote at one point. "There was no trace of her, in her place was a tearful, petty bore. . . . I saw my immortal soul sitting inside of me like Buddha, calm, immobile, allowing this vulgar fishwife to have her say."

Most of you know that Aline suffered even more of a decline as the relationship with her insatiable lover continued its downward spiral. In *The Journey Down*,

she tracks the course of her despair that led to her suicide attempt, and also, thank heaven, to her eventual ability to restore herself to a sense of her own integrity. It is a beautiful moving story that happily our own Duane Schneider is going to republish. Finally, in the book and in real life, Aline *was* able to reclaim the principle she had lived with since childhood, that no one can degrade you but yourself. As she wrote to her dear friend Bella Spewack, when the healing had taken place, "What I have of my own, the heart and core of myself, must neither be beaten nor modified nor even magnified by any other human being." She was, she said, "finally free of this corrosion."

I don't mean to imply that love Aline felt for Tom was without value for her. Corroded it may have become, but it was an affair of grand proportion, indeed, as grand as Wolfe's needs and demands.

I think, to end this talk by broadening its theme again, that there is something to be learned about relationships in studying this extraordinary affair. As men are able to become less fearful of their own needs, they may not distort those needs by emotionally abusing the women they choose to fulfill them. Had Thomas Wolfe been less grandiose, less threatened by his vulnerabilities, and more genuinely certain of his magnificent gifts, he would have had more to offer Aline Bernstein and also been far more receptive and enriched by what she so willingly and lovingly offered in return.

One aspect of unhealthy narcissism is often linked to the idea of a self-destructive bent . . . of a desire to fail under the drive to succeed. Again, we see that with stories about Hart.





He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not: The Wolfe-Bernstein Relationship

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When Thomas Wolfe was barely twenty-five years old, he wrote to his mistress, Aline Bernstein, about the fantasies of his youth. Here he was, this young Southerner from the small mountain town of Asheville, North Carolina, so far from the hills that had encircled him in his youth—so far from his past—and yet so very close, writing from Oxford, England, where he had gone to capture his past and re-create it into fiction. His quest was to represent upon the page the story of the buried life, that which was destined to become the American masterpiece *Look Homeward, Angel*. He reflected to Mrs. Bernstein in November 1926 about his earlier dreams:

When I was ten years old, I read myself blind and dizzy in all romantic legendry. . . . Sometimes I was the valiant young minister of the fashionable church, arrayed in warfare against my wealthy congregation in my fight against slum conditions, and aided by the millionaire's daughter . . . the leaper over garden walls, the climber of moonlit balconies. I was always 25 and she 22 or so. And the trees were always green. But I was born, my dear, with an autumnal heart. With me since I was twenty ripeness has been almost all. I began then by endowing my princess of 22 with the golden wealth of 35. . . . I think only of Helen and Dimeter moving their rich bodies in the ripening fields. Or of Peer Gynt's wife, Cid, in the grey English autumn. I think of my childhood autumn at home—the pain, the desire that was so much deeper, so much more nameless than Spring, the sharp knife—the maples burning red, the smell of ripening persimmons, the tired rich smell of the earth. . . . As I live here, going daily through the punctual pattern of my life, I seem to myself a richer, a braver adventurer than I have ever dreamed of being in

my childhood. The world's parade, the phantom show of faces pass me by . . . at the time of life's heat my rich fidelity to you, my grey haired widehipped timeless mother.¹

Who was this woman able to inspire in Thomas Wolfe such idolatry? When Thomas Wolfe met Aline Bernstein aboard the ship *Olympia* enroute from Europe in 1925, shortly before his twenty-fifth birthday, she was, at forty-four, almost twenty years his senior. A woman of great talent, she had achieved success as a stage and costume designer for the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York. In addition, she was married to the prominent stockbroker Theodore Bernstein and the mother of two grown children. And she was Jewish.

Throughout their relationship, Wolfe reacted irrationally toward Mrs. Bernstein's Jewish heritage. In the early correspondence, Wolfe referred to Mrs. Bernstein as "My Jew," or "My Dear Jew." As the relationship progressed, however, he became openly hostile about Mrs. Bernstein's background. Prophetically, in one of his earliest letters to her, he reflected bitterly about Jews, intellectuals and Northerners, criticizing in one breath "the Theatre Guild," "the literate Yanks," "the Dial circulation, and all other Phi Beta Kappa Jews."² He seemed to be constantly aware of Mrs. Bernstein's Jewishness. Indeed, he referred in his notebooks to all Jewish girls as "Rebeccas," and to Mrs. Bernstein as "Grey Rebecca." One of the earliest names for his fictional representation of Aline Bernstein was Rebecca Feitlebaum, who was subsequently renamed Esther Jack.

Thus, throughout, the correspondence between Thomas Wolfe and Aline Bernstein reflects the polarities of Wolfe's mercurial personality, as this brilliant, talented and often tortured man entrusted his deepest emotions and perceptions to this woman whom he was to love for the rest of his life. After one particularly hostile outburst, Wolfe reflected in his letter, "I will not scratch a word out of my abominable ravings. They are part of the evil texture of my soul, and you shall know me for the half-monster that I am. I love you truly, my dear Jew—below the dark wilderness is my heart; you are run into it like a thorn."³ Some time later, in November 1926, Wolfe wrote, "I have thought of us today—how you are a Jew, and like success, and how success and I are strangers, and how short my respite is, and how near the time of the final rooting up of all my desires."⁴ In his last letter to Aline Bernstein before he returned home, in December 1926, he reflected upon his great love for her: "Do you know, I am at home only when I am homeless? And I have always been homeless save with you."⁵ At the end of this letter he concluded, "I need women again—I am dull, dead lifeless. I need you. I kept the faith, Jew."⁶ And he added, "—what a hell, poor woman, you have to go to."⁷

Both lovers were painfully aware of the ambivalence of the relationship and the suffering it brought to each. In 1928, Mrs. Bernstein sent Wolfe a drawing of a heart pierced by seven swords with the inscription: "I saw this embroidered on a priest's robe in a church in Balzamo. It is an inadequate picture of my feeling.—One more sword and I'll bleed to death."⁸ Wolfe had earlier referred to this period in their relationship as the Grand Renunciation. Returning to Europe, he spent his summer roaming from country to country, successfully avoiding contact with Mrs. Bernstein, who was travelling there as well, and yet conducting during this period the most beautiful and love-filled portion of the correspondence. Shortly before she left for home, and aware that he had indeed successfully avoided seeing her, Wolfe wrote: "You are the most precious thing in my life, but you are imprisoned in a jungle of thorns, and I cannot come near you without bleeding."⁹

During 1929 the relationship between the two continued to deteriorate, and when in 1930 Wolfe accepted a Guggenheim Fellowship to travel to Europe and to work on his next book, the relationship was virtually over. Aline Bernstein maintained a steady flow of letters to Wolfe during the next several years, letters that were rarely answered. Shortly before Wolfe returned home in 1931, she wrote to him sadly about her Jewishness, which she associated in part with her sense of humanity and compassion for others: "I should like to be a drop of blood in your veins coursing through you. Just one drop of Jewish blood wouldn't hurt you."¹⁰

One drop of Jewish blood would have probably caused a conflagration within the already warring spirit of Thomas Wolfe, however, for he was indeed anti-Semitic. As Elizabeth Nowell notes, "Wolfe . . . had a provincial kind of anti-Semitism for at least the first thirty years of his life, which was probably derived from his mother and her people."¹¹ As Professor Snyder observed in *Thomas Wolfe: Ulysses and Narcissus*, "Wolfe was not only deeply anti-Semitic, but also hostile to practically every ethnic group, particularly Negroes, and at various times the French, the Germans, and the English. He had all the prejudices typical of a provincial boy from the South in the early part of the century."¹² Thus, Wolfe considered all who were "different" to be somehow "other" or outside of the mainstream of American life—just as he paradoxically sought to embrace these outsiders in much of his later fiction. For the rest of his life, Wolfe would remain simultaneously attracted and repelled by this "otherness," and as much as he sought to embrace diversity, he was never fully able to do so. From New York he wrote to his mother:

As I walk through the crowded and noisy streets of this immense city, and look at the dark swarthy faces of Jews, Italians, Greeks, and all the people of the New America that is roaring up around us here, I realize more keenly than ever that I come from the Old Americans—the people who settled the country, who fought its wars, who pushed westward.¹³

Wolfe's desire to embrace "the other" is nowhere more apparent than in his relationship with Aline Bernstein. With his Jewish lover, Wolfe was "melting into" or becoming one with his mysterious other, much like the characters in Zangwill's classic, *The Melting Pot*. In 1928, Thomas Wolfe wrote to Aline Bernstein: "My tender and golden love, you were my other loneliness, the only clasp of hand and heart that I had. I was a stranger, alone and lost in the wilderness, and I found you."¹⁴ Aline Bernstein became for Thomas Wolfe a symbol of American earth mother goddess into which he melted to be born into a new identity.

How does one explain the nature of Wolfe's towering inconsistencies, or as he states himself in *The Web and the Rock*, the fires of love and hate which alternately consumed him? Richard Kennedy observes in *The Window of Memory*:

Wolfe was the complete man of feeling: his anger, love, hate, sympathy, jealousy—all his emotional states—were violent. Often he entertained contradictory attitudes toward people or places, switching unexpectedly back and forth as his humor changed. Thus he loved and hated his mother, his family, Mrs. Bernstein, Maxwell Perkins, many friends, teachers, America, the South, New York, Paris, London, Germany, the Jews, the English, Bostonians, and so on. Since the greater his bond to anyone, the deeper the resentment Wolfe could feel, his bitterness toward the living members of his family in *Look Homeward, Angel* reflects his strong attachment. Though he was most of his life frankly anti-Semitic, a Jewish woman meant more to him than any other person in his life.¹⁵

Thus, to be loved by Thomas Wolfe almost certainly insured being alternately hated as well.

What caused these extreme polarities? Certainly, as has been discussed, place of birth and inherent prejudice were responsible for some of Wolfe's inconsistencies—but they cannot explain away the violence or the inner torments which consumed him as he was almost helplessly tossed between these extremes of emotion. Certainly, there were many inconsistencies in his early life as he was torn between the struggling factions of his father and mother. In addition, Julia's alternate giving and withdrawal of love caused the young boy to live in a state of emotional insecurity. According to Professor Snyder's theory, women were viewed by Wolfe

throughout his lifetime as either virgins or whores, ideal females or decadent monsters. "With the Jocasta type of mother," Snyder notes, the male child comes to regard his wonderful and sometimes loving mother as two-faced—both close and tender, and rejecting or suffocating or crippling. . . . the sons of Jocastas are unable to have satisfactory and love relationships with other women. The women they relate to are unavailable—as whores, or mental defectives, lesbians, or older women."¹⁶ Thus, once again we see in Wolfe the contraries of attraction and repulsion, as he was attracted to the beloved figure, then moved into absolute idealization, then fear of suffocation and loss of self, followed by hostility and the terror of being "swallowed up" which often approached paranoia, to final wrenching rejection. The fact that Aline Bernstein was Jewish exacerbated the situation. He seized on this "otherness" as a symbol of his hatred and need for freedom. In his paranoia, the beloved with the "flower face" became the dread Medusa who would rob the hero of his very soul and turn his heart to stone.

Aline Bernstein was only too aware of Wolfe's violent extremes of emotion and of the terrible fires that consumed him, as was her fictional counterpart, Esther Jack. Toward the end of *The Web and the Rock*, after George Webber has been in a bloody Oktoberfest brawl in Germany, Esther Jack reflects alone on a park bench in New York about her great lost love. It is interesting to note that Thomas Wolfe, the author, has given his heroine great insight into the chaos that exists within her lover's soul:

He has the face of a demented angel, his head is wild and beautiful, and there is madness and darkness and evil in his brain. He is more cruel than death, and more lovely than a flower. His heart was made for love, and it is full of hate and darkness. His soul was made for light and purity, and it is poisoned by evil and vile suspicion. His brain should be a bright and flowering sword, and it is sick and twisted with its nightmare. He flies away from those who love and worship him, he stabs them to the heart and leaves them, he goes away with strangers who will do him harm. He is like a god, all made of light, and he lives alone in chains and darkness.¹⁷

With such keen insight has Thomas Wolfe, through the lens and perspective of his Jewish heroine, identified himself.

In "The Good Child's River," upon which Wolfe labored between 1930 and 1933, the young Esther Jack relates in the first person the story of her early life and that of her family. Certainly Aline Bernstein here fulfills Reeves's definition of muse, as she becomes for Thomas Wolfe the Scheherazade she promised him to be, a lens, through which he was able to envision a whole new world. When

Esther's twelve-year-old cousin Robert runs home in tears after being taunted for being a Jew, his mother, a devout, serious woman with little humor, becomes almost hysterical, but his Uncle Joe, Esther's father, provides an argument to quiet the anti-Semitic Rags Cassidy, who has responded to Robert's declaration that Christ was a Jew with the assertion "He wasn't nothing! He was the Loid." "Ask him which Loid he means," Joe responded. "First of all there is the North German Loid. Then there is the British South African Loid. Then there are all the Loids in the insurance business. Then there is Loids and Taylor's. Then there are all the English Loids: there is Loid Tennyson and Loid Burguynne and Loid Halpus. Maybe he means Loid Halpus. . . . Ask him if he doesn't mean Loid Halpus."¹⁸ Although Rags angrily responds to this argument with the retort that he will someday kill himself a Jew, he is rendered speechless and has indeed lost the argument. Wolfe, the creator, has encompassed in this passage both anti-Semitic youngster and his Jewish adversary.

In February 1938, according to David Donald, after drinking and stewing about Bernard DeVoto's allusions to his characterization in Mrs. Bernstein's newly published book *The Journey Down*, Wolfe went to the Bernstein apartment and began denouncing the Jews, berating her Jewish friends, and cheering for Adolf Hitler. It is no wonder that Mrs. Bernstein punched him. "It succeeded in finally freeing me from the spell," she wrote.¹⁹ Yet was one who loved Thomas Wolfe ever free from his spell? In 1950 Aline Bernstein wrote to Elizabeth Nowell about her relationship with Thomas Wolfe:

It was a supreme experience, the most wonderful thing in the world. The most important thing between us was our feeling for each other. It was a deep passionate love, added to a clear fine friendship. Personal things were always coming between us, his intense jealousy of me, one thing and another. Our real companionship was beyond anything one can imagine, often so gay and filled with laughter. We shared a sense of beauty in poetry and painting that enriched our lives, brought everything to twice its value. That is what remains to me of Tom.²⁰

Those who loved Thomas Wolfe seemed to understand that it was necessary at times to reach beyond his words and actions. To understand the genius of the man is to be aware that he achieved ultimately that unity in the midst of flux and chaos for which his tortured spirit strived throughout his lifetime. Through his genius, he fought past the demons of hatred, prejudice, and self-doubt that so often pursued and betrayed him. Few of us are unaware of the range of contradictions and limitations he possessed. Yet for every vile curse and slander within Wolfe's writing, there stands its contradiction: taunts and prejudice against

the black man are balanced by his masterwork "Child by Tiger;" vile reproaches of the Jew are answered in "I Have a Thing to Tell You;" Esther Jack remains throughout time one of Wolfe's finest fictional creations; and Thomas Wolfe has captured for us all in "The Good Child's River" the story of a young Jewish girl and her family. Wolfe's life was a quest for unity, fixity in the midst of chaos and complexity. Despite his own personal torment and delusion, Thomas Wolfe was able in his writing to reach beyond his limitations and in so doing transcend them.

Notes

¹Thomas Wolfe, *My Other Loneliness: Letters of Thomas Wolfe and Aline Bernstein*, edited by Suzanne Stutman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 119-120.

²*Ibid.*, 52.

³*Ibid.*, 102.

⁴*Ibid.*, 117.

⁵*Ibid.*, 135-136.

⁶*Ibid.*, 139.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, 152.

⁹*Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁰August, 1931. This letter has been edited from the text.

¹¹Elizabeth Nowell, *Thomas Wolfe: A Biography* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1960), 98.

¹²William Snyder, *Thomas Wolfe: Ulysses and Narcissus* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1971), 160.

¹³Thomas Wolfe, *Thomas Wolfe's Letters to His Mother*, edited by C. Hugh Holman and Sue Fields Ross (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 162.

¹⁴Wolfe, *My Other Loneliness*, 194.

¹⁵Richard S. Kennedy, *The Window of Memory: The Literary Career of Thomas Wolfe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 14-15.

¹⁶Snyder, *Ulysses and Narcissus*, 116.

¹⁷Thomas Wolfe, *The Web and the Rock* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), 629-630.

¹⁸Thomas Wolfe, "The Good Child's River," The William B. Wisdom Collection of Thomas Wolfe Manuscripts, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

¹⁹David Herbert Donald, *Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987), 444.

²⁰Nowell, *Thomas Wolfe*, 99.





Thomas Wolfe, Women, Narcissism, and Dependency

William U. Snyder
Ohio University

Almost everyone who has studied Thomas Wolfe's writing or his behavior agrees that he was a very narcissistic person. There are many signs of this in his biography and writings. He himself wrote in a draft of *Look Homeward, Angel*, "The sad family of this world . . . is joined from its birth . . . in our wild hunger for ourselves . . . the great obsession of Narcissus" (*Notebooks* 106). His preoccupation with his body image permeates his books and letters. He once wrote, "I could not stink, even if I never had a bath," and referred to himself as Marshall Gant and Ace Gant, the savior of the universe. "My flesh is finer than their gross peasant flesh," he said of his college contemporaries (LHA 488, 493). Bernard DeVoto said that Wolfe's work exuded infantile regression. Wolfe's agent, Elizabeth Nowell, described him as a person who experienced a very prolonged adolescence (*Letters* xvi). Oscar Carghill said he was absorbed in himself (see Field, vii). He could not form sustained relationships with others nor quell his over-compensatory boasting. He was tremendously preoccupied with the recounting of his inner experiences. He was devoted to good food in enormous quantities and to heavy drinking. He was sexually preoccupied with his own sensual pleasure. He told a friend, Albert Coates, that he wondered whether he would ever cease to be a child (*Letters* 55). Wolfe felt that nothing could stop him from greatness but insanity, disease, or death. He said to Robert Reynolds, another friend, that his work was so good it made him cry (*Notebooks* 259). And most important, his writing was *all* deeply and almost entirely autobiographical. All of these actions are classic signs of pervasive narcissism.

The other major psychodynamic of Thomas Wolfe was his dependency. Only in his last years did he begin to outgrow this behavior. At age twenty-five he

expected his mother to provide heavy financial support. He slept with her until age nine and was called her baby even in his teens. Later he expected Aline Bernstein to cook his meals and furnish his apartments, even after their love affair had broken off. He accepted and expected heavy financial support from her for years. And she financed most of his seven trips to Europe. Many of life's normal activities, such as driving a car or owning a home or getting married, were experiences he never tried. He expected Perkins or Scribner's to manage his financial affairs and to support him with advances of money whenever he ran out of it. He even expected Perkins, and later Miss Nowell and Edward Aswell, to shape his discursive writings into manageable prose fiction.

How did these traits of intense narcissism and deep dependency influence his relationships with the women in his life? We should consider here the ways in which he saw women as desirable people, and then as undesirable ones.

Favorable Perceptions of Women

Perhaps most predominately among favorable perceptions, Wolfe saw women as providers of nurturant and caring behavior. While deeply dependent on his mother at the beginning, he perceived her caring as somewhat divided; he thought she cared more for the black loam of Carolina and the sand of Florida than for him (*Letters* 98). At age 25, he wrote a prospective employer that he was still heavily dependent upon his mother financially (*Letters* 97). From his sister Mabel he received even more complete maternalism and nurturance. He wrote numerous long paeons of tribute to the depth of her generosity, although this was sometimes momentarily in abeyance when she teased or criticized him. (*Letters* 80). About Mabel he wrote in 1925, "She is fierce, tender, angry, biting, caressing, by turns. . . . Strong commonplace people drink her vitality like wine. . . . The simple and terrific fact is that with all her fuming, fretting, weeping, and love of adulation, I have never seen her do a selfish thing. . . . She has more greatness in her than any woman I've ever known. I suppose, honestly, that's why I sometimes get tired of the women I meet. . . ." (*Letters* 80).

Wolfe perceived his teacher, Margaret Roberts, as deeply nurturant. He called her "the mother of my spirit" (*Letters* 204), and she was surely this, but she also proved to be a true surrogate mother much of the time, especially when Tom boarded at her school while his mother was in Florida for the winters. To Mrs. Roberts he wrote, in long letters, "You are a lovely, beautiful woman. Other women I have known—young and old—wanted to mother me, to ruffle my hair when it's curly, or to feed me. But you mother the minds and spirits of young men until they grow incandescent. . . ." (*Letters* 68). Later he wrote

“Do you think I have forgotten? Do you think I ever will? You are entombed in my flesh, you are in the pulse of my blood, the thought of you makes great music in me—and before I come to death, I shall use the last thrust of my talent . . . to put your beauty into words” (*Letters* 123).

Perhaps the woman Wolfe was most dependent on was Aline Bernstein, his mistress for a number of years. Nineteen years older than he, she was indeed a mother substitute, who provided a deeper caring and treasuring than his own mother, Julia Wolfe, had done. He recognized his dependency on this caring over and over, and praise from Aline was a major driving force for him. About his affair with Aline Bernstein, he wrote to Margaret Roberts “. . . if, in this affair, you see only consequences of future unhappiness for me . . . am I so rich, then, that I can strike love in the face, drive away the only comfort, security, repose I have ever known, and destroy myself just as my mind and heart, aflame with hope and maturity, as they have never been before . . . promise me at length release?” (*Letters* 109).

Secondly, Wolfe found women to be consistent providers of income, and for most of his life he was dependent upon them for financial support. Through age twenty-five he obtained at least half of his financial support from his mother, and the rest from his teaching. Then Aline Bernstein took over, but with some occasional support from other women whom he encountered, as on his European travels. It was not until publication of *Look Homeward, Angel* began to bring in royalties that Wolfe depended more on his own efforts to support himself. And even later he sometimes turned to Aline for further support, although after age thirty he turned most often to his publishers for assistance.

Turning to another area, Tom looked to women for sexual gratification. But he showed little concern for the women's sexual satisfactions or emotional needs. Copying his father and brothers, he very early became sexually promiscuous, and he frequently boasted of the hundreds of women he had slept with. Important, in this regard, was his frequent demeaning of these sexual partners. He treated these women as prostitutes, and he could not say enough derogatory and insulting things to and about them. Most of these relationships tended to be of short duration, although sometimes very gratifying while they lasted. In a long letter he wrote in 1925 to one of his former lovers, “Physically I was repelled, as I am repelled by most Boston women. On the one occasion that I remember touching you with any affection, I had a terrible internal shame, that feeling of wanting to cover my face with my hands and turn away. . . . The old horror of that dead cold Northern flesh came on me again. . . . I offered you affection—you gave me shame, humiliation, and dishonor. You have in you great qualities;

you have in you also the qualities of the peasant woman. . . . I remember those last, and I do not want to see you again. I do not like you now" (*Letters* 85).

Another useful characteristic of women was their ability to cook. Food was tremendously important to Wolfe, and he frequently commented on the appropriate roles of women as being in the bed and the kitchen (*Notebooks* 148). He frequently wrote lists of food he loved, and he often compared the bodies of women to butter, honey, cream, and other delectables. Let me quote only a couple of the many food-oriented messages to be found in his notebooks and letters. In 1926 he wrote, "I lay upon the swelling cushion of her belly, locking her warm pillared legs around my neck . . . drinking from her unmarked breasts, draughts of rich, warm, never-ending milk. . . . Slowly I drank the thick, sweet, liquor of her tongue and throat. My blood grew rich as a slow wine. . . . I drank her till I was drunken; we were ambrosial. . . ." (*Notebooks* 62). In 1931 he wrote, as a contemplated dialogue, "'Have you any milk for me there?' he says. 'No,' I say, 'No.' 'If you were any good, if you loved me, if you cared anything for me, you would have milk for me. . . .'" Later he said "Eat me like honey; let me be consumed. I will be in you. I will be devoured by you" (*Notebooks* 545).

Finally, Tom sometimes found women to be providers of intellectual stimulation. This was particularly true of Aline Bernstein, but also to some extent of Elizabeth Nowell, his agent. Miss Nowell revised with him, page by page, his later manuscripts which became *The Web and the Rock* and *You Can't Go Home Again*. In 1929 he wrote about Aline Bernstein, "[When] I was penniless . . . I met the great and beautiful friend who stood by me throughout all the torture, struggle, and madness of my nature over three years. . . . That another person, to whom . . . greater success is constant and habitual, should get happiness and joy from my own modest beginning is only another of the miracles of life" (*Letters* 165). But he was reluctant to acknowledge women's independent competence, although he was willing to let them use their abilities to assist him develop his ideas.

Critical Perceptions of Women

Now let us turn to some of the many unfavorable perceptions Wolfe had of women. First we find that many times he called them whores, or "flirty." He accused them of lacking morals. He wrote: "Women have no morals, they have only the sense of fashion. If the fashion is for adultery, they will adulterate openly; if the fashion is for niggers, they will have niggers; if the fashion says niggers are loathesome, they will loathe niggers. . . ." (*Notebooks* 483).

Next, Tom saw women as demanding. This is illustrated by a comment he made in his notebook about Aline: "What rut of life with the Jew now? Is this a new beginning, or the final ending?" (*Notebooks* 96). (I need not comment here on his intense anti-Semitism; he was in fact intensely anti-ethnic for all but white Protestants, and even for people of nations like England and Germany, countries which he said he loved. In 1930 he wrote about Aline Bernstein that she demanded that he cable her from Europe, or she would sail to find him. He wrote: "This woman, of course . . . wrecked me, maddened me, and betrayed my love constantly, but she will not leave me alone, now. I hope the whore dies immediately and horribly. I would rejoice at news of this vile women's death" (*Notebooks* 485).

Wolfe considered women to be controlling or persecuting persons (*Notebooks* 533). He criticized Aline's "destructive maternalism" (*Notebooks* 55), although maternalism was the trait for which he usually commended her. He was unable to make an emotional commitment to women, and when he felt pressure from them to do so, he became hostile and critical.

Tom also called women duplicitous. For example, he called Aline a liar, a bitch, a betrayer, and a deceiver (*Notebooks* 545). He also accused her of being shallow and superficial, because of her interest in the theater. (*Notebooks*, 157, 433, 467, 485).

Resultant Deep Hostility Toward Women, and Consequent Withdrawal

As a result of his deep insecurity in his relationships with women, Wolfe developed a component of deep hostility which eventually became quite paranoid in quality. He felt very inadequate in dealing with them. In 1936 he wrote: "I have never in my life known how to 'get women.' My ideas about getting them are primitive, crude, and plain. In college . . . I used to go to the neighboring towns—Durham, Raleigh, and Salisbury, etc.—and go to a whore house down in the nigger section or on the fringes of it, or to a cheap hotel. . . ." (*Notebooks* 736).

In 1931 he wrote to Aline Bernstein, "Last night I saw you in the way . . . that I fear in women. For there seems to be a terrible chemistry at work in them . . . when they become angry at us we see . . . the formidable and repulsive enemy that we are at war with; . . . in a moment the lovely creature who made music for us . . . has turned to a horrible monster, and we remember our former contact with her with loathing. Our flesh turns sick . . . [and] we want to get away and forget about it. . . ." (*Notebooks* 556).

As early as 1929 he wrote, "The American Woman, what shall be done with her? Is she worth saving, or should the next war be directed toward her extermination and the nation recruited with German, Austrian, and Scandinavian women?" (*Notebooks* 353). Later he wrote a letter to Aline's son (but never sent it) demanding that "if you are a man with any shred of pride and decency . . . you will see to it that your mother no longer disgraces herself and her family by wilfully running after and doing the utmost in her power to wreck the life of someone twenty-five years younger than she is. . . ." (*Notebooks* 581).

What forces could account for Wolfe's shifting from a deep love for Aline to his paranoid hatred? Actually nothing that Aline did deserved this enormous reversal of his attitude. The problem lay in the personality of Wolfe himself. It became apparent, as their relationship deepened, that Aline began to expect some reciprocation of her fondness. Not requiring marriage, she nevertheless expected some fidelity and an affectionate return of all the many tender and fine things she was doing for Tom. But while this dependency led him to expect her to give these tokens of affection, his narcissism prohibited such reciprocity. Everything had to be focussed on the satisfaction of *his* needs, not hers.

Secondly, Wolfe was jealous of Aline's professional maturity and success. And this was too great a threat to his ego. He felt very competitive and seemed unable to feel reassured that he was becoming successful in *his* profession. He was jealous of any time she spent at her work and in the theater. This led him to utter nothing but contempt for actors and the acting profession, which was her professional world. Possibly his sexual responsiveness then abated some, and he developed the paranoid notion that she was trying to make him impotent, "drying up his loins," as he put it.

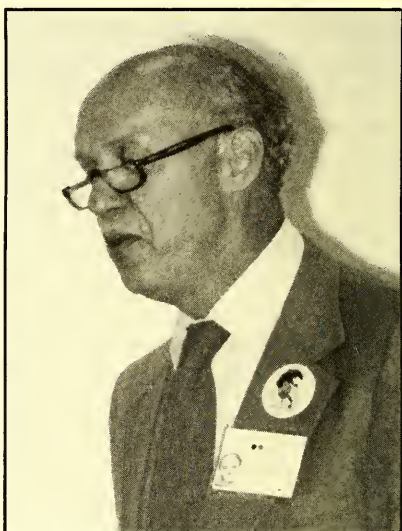
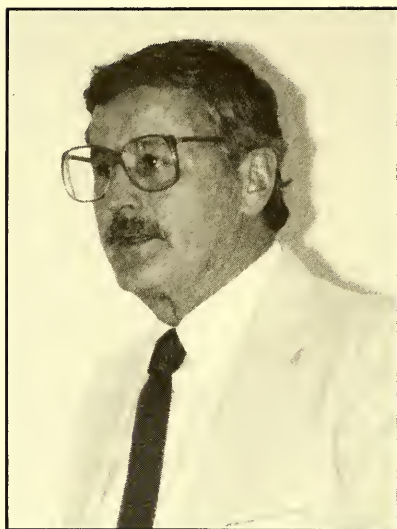
In summary, as a clinical psychologist, I must say that Wolfe, because of his deeply narcissistic and dependent personality components, saw women as either nurturant mother substitutes or as sex objects to be exploited and then cast aside. He could offer extensive praise and protestations of love, and then in the next breath decry and derogate them with a bitterness which has to be labeled paranoid. He said that love is a fatal disease and a madness (*Notebooks* 633). This deeply insecure and unhappy man tended to project blame for his troubles onto women in general and particularly upon his former mistress, Aline Bernstein. (He could, of course, be equally castigating toward minority group members, and especially Jews and blacks.) Projection and rationalization of his insecurity and/or guilt feelings were abundant throughout his writing. He desperately needed to undergo some psychotherapy or counseling, but he scoffed at the idea. Perhaps, had he obtained therapeutic help, his creativeness, like that of

Tennessee Williams, would have been diminished. In such a case we would need to choose between letting him remain a creative misogynist or become an intellectually sterile family man. I guess in the long run society would settle for the creative woman-hater, although in the short-term perspective it might prefer the family man, or some sort of compromise.

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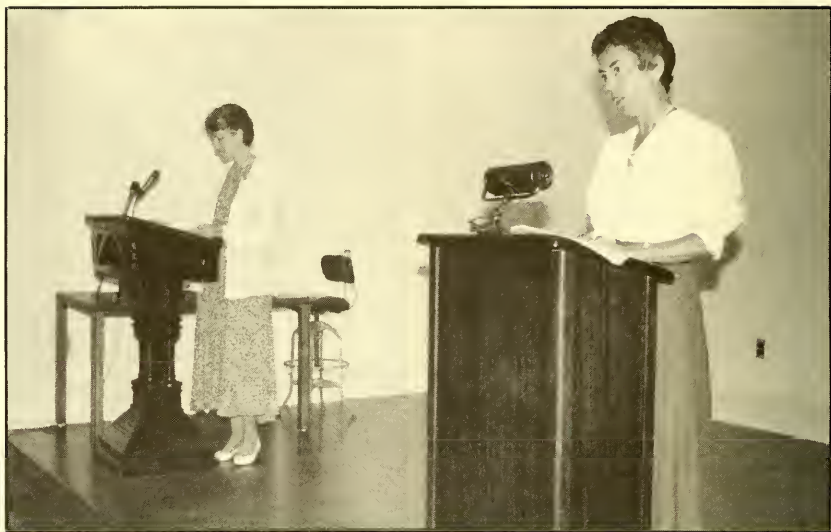




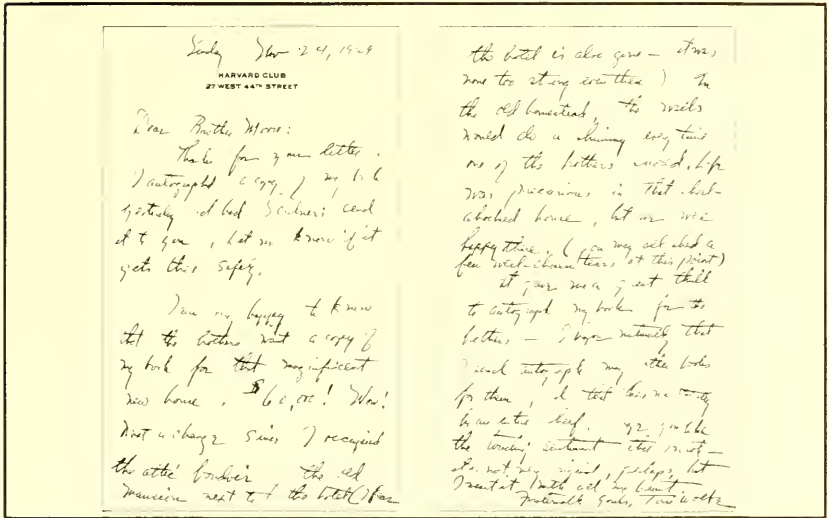
THE SPEAKERS: Clockwise from top left, Robert J. Willis, Carol Johnston, John L. Idol, Jr., and Frank C. Wilson. (Unless otherwise noted, all photos are by Jerry W. Cotten, North Carolina Collection.)



MORE SPEAKERS: Clockwise from top left, Jesse C. Gatlin, Jr., David B. Kesterson, James W. Clark, Jr., and Elaine P. Jenkins.



AND MORE: Top, Clara Stites (left) and Mary Aswell Doll (daughters respectively of Elizabeth Nowell and Edward Aswell) and bottom (left to right), Reid Huntley, Carole Klein, Suzanne Stutman, and William U. Snyder.



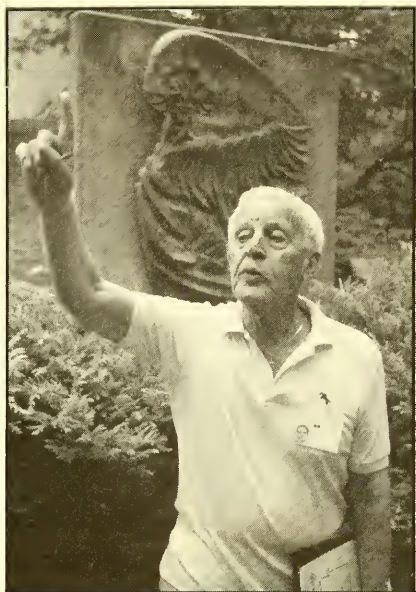
WOLFEANA: Top, Richard Walser and H. G. Jones hold ribbon for opening of new Thomas Wolfe Room by TWS President Elizabeth Evans; and Gladys Hall Coates, a longtime Wolfe friend, takes a look. At bottom is North Caroliniana Society Keepsakes, No. 2, featuring a letter from Wolfe to his old fraternity at UNC, Pi Kappa Phi, issued in honor of the meeting.



RETIRING OFFICERS: Bobbie E. Purser and John S. Phillipson were presented sketches of Wolfe by the incoming president, Morton I. Teicher (top); and at bottom the retiring president, Elizabeth Evans, recognized biographer David Herbert Donald with a photograph of the novelist.



THE NORTH CAROLINIANA GALLERY prepared an exhibition of selected items from UNC's Thomas Wolfe Collection.

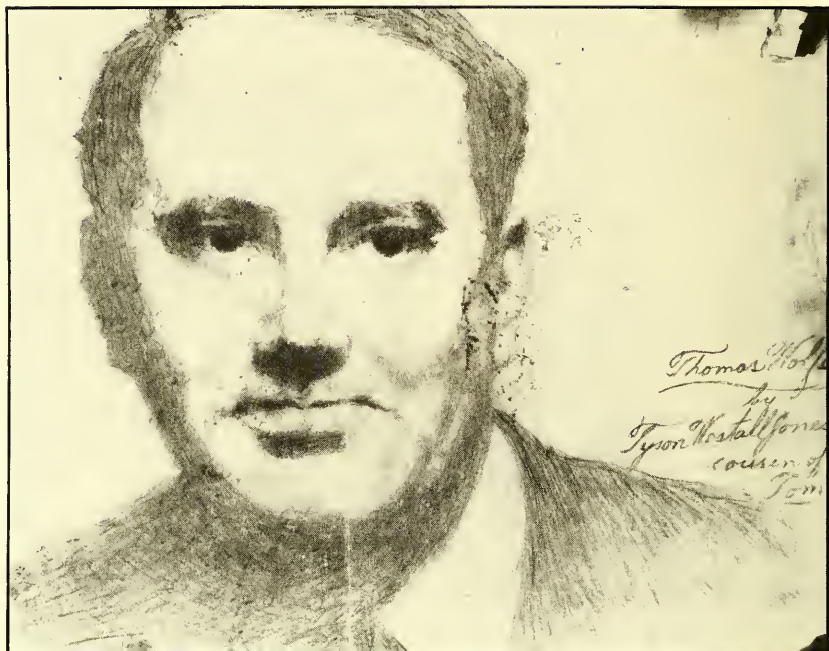


TRAILING WOLFE: Richard Walser led members on a tour of Wolfean sites on the UNC campus. At left he makes a point in front of the Wolfe memorial.





THE BANQUET: Novelist Doris Betts (top) introduced Composer Richard Adler, who performed at the Saturday night banquet in the Morehead Building.



NEW VIEW OF THOMAS WOLFE: A multiluted sheet of paper in the Fred Wolfe Collection in the North Carolina Collection contains a sketch of the novelist (minus part of his hair) by Tyson Westall Jones, son of Morton Jones and Louise Evangeline Westall Jones and grandson of Una McLeod Westall and Thomas Crockett Westall, the latter the youngest brother of Julia Westall Wolfe.

The North Caroliniana Society, Inc.
North Carolina Collection
Wilson Library 024-A, UNC Campus
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514

Chartered by the Secretary of State on 11 September 1975 as a private nonprofit corporation under provisions of Chapter 55A of the *General Statutes of North Carolina*, the North Caroliniana Society is dedicated to the promotion of increased knowledge and appreciation of North Carolina's heritage. This it accomplishes in a variety of ways: encouragement of scholarly research and writing in and the teaching of state and local history; publication of documentary materials, including the numbered, limited-edition *North Caroliniana Society Imprints* and *North Caroliniana Society Keepsakes*; sponsorship of professional and lay conferences, seminars, lectures, and exhibitions; commemoration of historic events, including sponsorship of markers and plaques; and assistance to the North Carolina Collection and North Caroliniana Gallery of the University of North Carolina Library and other cultural organizations, such as the Friends of the Library, the Friends of the Archives, the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, the Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina, and the North Carolina Writers Conference.

Incorporated by H. G. Jones, William S. Powell, and Louis M. Connor, Jr., who soon were joined by a distinguished group of North Carolinians, the Society was limited to one hundred members for its first decade. However, it does elect from time to time additional individuals meeting its strict criterion of "adjudged performance" in service to their state's culture—i.e., those who have demonstrated a continuing interest in and support of the historical, literary, and cultural heritage of North Carolina. The Society, a tax-exempt organization under provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, expects service rather than dues. For its programs, it depends upon the contributions, bequests, and devises of its members and friends. Its IRS number is 56-1119848. Upon request, contributions to the Society may be counted toward membership in the Chancellor's Club. The Society administers the Archie K. Davis Fund, given in 1987 by the Research Triangle Foundation in honor of its retiring board chairman and the Society's longtime president.

A highlight of the Society's year is the presentation of the North Caroliniana Society Award for long and distinguished service in the encouragement, production, enhancement, promotion, and preservation of North Caroliniana. Starting with Paul Green, the Society has recognized Tar Heels such as Albert Coates, Sam J. Ervin, Jr., Sam Ragan, Gertrude S. Carraway, John Fries Blair, William and Ida Friday, William S. Powell, Mary and James Semans, and David Stick. The proceedings of the awards banquets, published in the *Imprints* series, furnish rare glimpses into the lives of those recognized.

The Society has its headquarters in the North Carolina Collection, the "Conscience of North Carolina," which seeks to preserve for present and future generations all that has been or is published by North Carolinians regardless of subject and about North Carolina and North Carolinians regardless of author or source. In this mission the Collection's clientele is far broader than the University community; indeed, it is the entire citizenry of North Carolina, as well as those outside the state whose research extends to North Carolina or North Carolinians. Members of the North Caroliniana Society share a very special relationship to this unique Collection that dates back to 1844 and stands unchallenged as the largest and most comprehensive repository in America of published materials about a single state. The North Caroliniana Gallery, opened in 1988, adds exhibition and interpretive dimensions to the Collection's traditional services. These combined resources fulfill the vision of President David L. Swain (1801-1868), who founded the Collection; Librarian Louis Round Wilson (1876-1979), who nurtured it; and Philanthropist John Sprunt Hill (1869-1961), who generously endowed it. All North Carolinians are enriched by this precious legacy.

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Thomas Wolfe in a Brooklyn street scene, painted by Douglas Gorsline, 1946, and given to the North Carolina Collection, UNC Library, in 1975 by Phillip and Ruth Hettleman.

